

Carving Culture



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

Jim Bergeron's woodcarving tools sit on a table at the Barbey Maritime Center.

Traditional, Native American designs have legends

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian



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Marilyn Rooper applies paint to a raven woodcarving. Rooper took one of Jim Bergeron's woodcarving classes earlier in the year and continues to come to the Thursday sessions.

Jim Bergeron invites you to come carve with him.

An Oregon State University Extension Sea Grant agent in Clatsop County until he retired in 2002, Bergeron has taught many classes on traditional Northwest Coast Native American woodworking, which he was first exposed to while living as a graduate student in Kodiak, Alaska, for a year.

His most recent class was in March at the Barbey Maritime Center, as part of the Columbia River Maritime Museum's series of classes on traditional crafts.

"At the end of the class, no one wanted to stop," Bergeron said.

With the museum's permission, Bergeron and his former students started meeting in the boat-building workshop on the maritime center's east wing. Each Thursday from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., he lays out his vast collection of tools, along with copious designs for carvers to sample.

"Most of them are based off animals," Bergeron said of the native carvings. "A lot of them are supernatural animals."

"Almost all of these designs have a legend and a story."

Bergeron also provides his guidance, along with fellow longtime carver Lonnie Acord.

Acord said he started carving as a child in Ketchikan, Alaska, cutting off broom handles and making them into toys. At the workshop in early July, Acord was carving

a wolf's head dance panel.

"You never look at a piece of wood the same," said Marilyn Rooper, one of Bergeron's former carving students who was etching a raven into a cedar board.

The beauty of carving, Bergeron said, is how someone can take a little time to learn the tools, buy a two-by-four and entertain themselves for months on end.

Learning native

Bergeron grew up in northern Minnesota, with Chippewa and Sioux classmates. He found artifacts along the lake shores and became intrigued by how they were made.

He came to Oregon in 1964 to study oceanography in graduate school at Oregon State.

After returning from his stint in Kodiak, Bergeron said he wanted to learn to work with an adze, a curved blade used for shaping wood. He learned from famed sculptor Douglas Granum, who has work displayed at the North by Northwest Gallery in Cannon Beach.

Over the years, Bergeron has taught many classes for Oregon State at the Hatfield Marine Science Center and others at Clatsop Community College. But the classes, he said, became too expensive.

Bergeron's courses at the maritime museum cost \$75 for five weeks, although he said anyone is welcome to join the group of carvers on Thursdays. He even sells cedar and basswood for carvers to work with.



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Lonnie Acord, of Seaview, carves a northern-style wolf dance wand at the Barbey Maritime Center during a Thursday carving session.



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A stack of carving patterns sits on a table.