

Master Horner

PROFILES

This is the sixth in a series of articles on those members of the Honourable Company of Horners who have achieved the status of Master Horner. Currently there are nine members who have attained this status and each one has played an integral role in the Guild, whether it is in their demonstrated artisan skills, leadership abilities, or being instrumental in the growth and development of our organization.

John Proud | Roland Cadle | John Kiselica
Lee Larkin | Art DeCamp | Joe Becker
Willy Frankfort | Erv Tschanz | Ron Ehler

In accordance with the Guild's Standing Rules, for anyone to become a Master Horner, an individual must "demonstrate a superlative level of ability in carving, heating and pressing, turning, engraving, and integrating woods and metals with cow horn by presenting three horn objects that demonstrate his or her ability to the Awards Committee for evaluation," plus give "an original written and oral presentation to the HCH at an annual meeting or to another accredited organization on some aspect of horn working or its history." Needless to say, this is a high standard that has been met by only a few members and each has played a vital role in making the HCH what it is today.

Erv Tschanz

Master Horner

Erv Tschanz clearly missed his calling in life. Were I to select a profession for him, he would, without question, be a college professor.

He is meticulous to a fault, well researched, an avid documenter, and has the patience of Job.

Ask Erv what time it is and he'll explain exactly how to build a watch, not any watch, but a Rolex! I don't mean this as a criticism, but as a compliment to his thoroughness of knowledge and his willingness to share it with those who have a sincere interest in learning. I recently spoke with him about a problem I was having with a project and halfway into describing my dilemma, Erv not only told me what I had done wrong, but how to correct it and explained the importance of documenting the correct procedure! I tell you – the guy is good!!

Erv is from Rochester, New York and after graduating from college in 1962 became involved in the family business, Tschanz Landscape Service, Inc. He left for two years to serve in the U.S. Army, one year in Korea and his final year as a military advisor to Reserve units. After leaving active duty, he served several more years in a reserve Civil Affairs unit attaining the rank of captain. He now runs the family landscaping business in addition to his Gen Nis He Yo Trading Company.

Erv started making powder horns, bags and other accouterments back in the mid 1950's when muzzleloading was experiencing a revival. He became involved with the Brigade of the American Revolution (BAR) as a rifleman. To help meet the needs of fellow reenactors he started making additional items

like horn cups and boxes as well as sewing items and in 1980 he became a Master Craftsman and Hornsmith with the BAR. He did a lot of competitive shooting along with primitive type events and was selected as scribe for the second NMLRA Rendezvous.

His passion for horn working is fed by the desire to reproduce items that a professional horner would have to be able to do. Erv stated that "Items produced on a lathe have been my fascination. To be able to make boxes with lids and



It was here that he met a fellow named Roland Cadle and a friendship was established. That winter Roland invited Erv to come down and spend some time with him and learn some of the mysteries of the horners' craft. After Roland turned in for the night, Erv would spend another hour or so making sketches and notes of all he had seen and learned.

Over the years Erv worked with and received help from Roland, so when Roland mentioned that it was his dream to create an organization like the Honourable Company of Horners, Erv told him that he would like to be a part of that dream and help in the establishment of the Guild.

bottoms that made them water tight without the use of glue was my goal. I needed a lathe to make the forms for tumblers, boxes and some of the powder horns. At this point I branched out and started to produce wood items like bowls, plates, containers, etc with tight fitting lids. Over the years I have been able to take workshops with some of the world's best wood turners. This helped me in my turning of horn and wood items. It showed me what tools I might need and how to sharpen them."

Some interesting facets of Erv's past in horn working has been his involvement during the late 70's and early 80's in making several powder



horns for Peter Blaisdell of Rochester, NY, which he in turn engraved. Erv also teamed up with Norman S. Brilliant and made all the horns that he engraved, many of which are now in historic sites. As a point of interest, one of my favorite Muzzle Blasts articles was one published in January 1994, pages 4-7, entitled "Historic Horns" by Norman S. Brilliant. The horn featured was made by Erv and engraved by the author.

Needless to say, Erv spends a lot of time in his workshop which is in his house in a space about 10 feet wide and 14 feet long. In this small space are two bench grinders, a bandsaw, floor mounted drill press, lathe and a woodworker's bench. In addition he has a number of hand planes, draw knives and lots of different shaped files. Most of his work is done over the winter months, although he does get some work done during the summer and fall.

Most of his research and ideas come from books of which he has a rather large collection. His wife Julie was a librarian and like Erv, has a passion for history and research and even assisted him with a line of early American leather work. Horn collections have been another source, most of which has been through the annual meetings with the HCH. The



most impressive was the horn items and tools at the Mercer Museum in Doylestown, Pennsylvania.

When asked about his favorite style of horn, Erv replied that the most requested type of horn he makes has been the French and Indian War style. He has done some plain buffalo horns, a few screwtips, and some flattened pocket horns.

Erv's work has appeared in Muzzle Blasts, Muzzleloader magazines and Buckskin Report. He is a life member of the NMLRA, the Brigade of American Revolution since 1976, Rochester Woodworkers' Society, Finger Lakes Wood Turners and the American Association of Woodturners.

Erv Tschanz is the consummate professional, always willing to take time to assist others, and embodies all those qualities required to be a Master Horner. If you plan to attend this year's Guild meeting, take time to meet Erv, you'll be glad you did.

If you are interested in seeing more of Erv's work you can contact him at 17 Kent Park, Rochester, NY 14610 and order a catalog from his Gen Nis He Yo Trading Company, phone him at (585)271-5263 (evenings best time), or drop him an email at tschanzlandscape@aol.com and list the subject as HCH or Horner. ■

