

AAW | AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF WOODTURNERS

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Member Profile: C. A. Savoy

May 25, 2017

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C. A. Savoy
Member #8251



C.A. Savoy holding a cane he turned for the Eagle Cane Project.

Hooked on Turning



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It was not until the mid-1980s that C.A. Savoy first stood at a lathe - when he needed to duplicate a piece of corner molding on an antique high boy chest he was repairing.

"I got a basic Craftsman lathe from Sears - tubular bed, cast iron - and went home and scraped out a piece from a paper pattern I had drawn," he recalls. "After that, the lathe went to the corner of the shop gathering dust for the next eight years."

Seeing Savoy today, it seems almost impossible that this master turner did not begin to seriously turn wood until he was in his 60s. As the chief operations director and long-time mainstay of [Capital Area Woodturners](#) (CAW) in northern Virginia, Savoy is regarded as one of the grand old men of American woodturning, and he is still going strong. Countless novices first learned the best and safest ways to turn wood under Savoy's eye, and in particular how to put the sharpest edge on a tool.

Long-time shopmates chuckle when describing Savoy's attention to detail and temperamental demand for best practices in the shop.

"You don't want to face C.A. if you don't leave a clean work station or help put the shop back in order," says his friend Patrick O'Brien. Born in New Orleans in 1933, Savoy is proud of his Cajun roots and the hard work he experienced growing up around the sugar cane fields in Louisiana. After service in the military, he spent 27 years in the American Telephone and Telegraph sales force.

In 1993, C.A. and his wife Joyce visited her Ohio cousin who re-introduced him to turning. From that point on, Savoy was hooked. He pulled his old Sears lathe out and began scraping bowls and candlesticks that he admits were "pretty crude." Before long, he was spending six to ten hours a day, every day, at his lathe.

"I read books and pretty much taught myself how to turn basic shapes," he says. "But before long I was looking for instruction from the best turners I could find - guys like David Ellsworth, John Jordan, Stoney Lamar, Ray Key, Lyle Jamieson, and JoHannes Michelsen. They became lifelong friends as well as teachers."

In 1994, Savoy joined CAW, which was meeting at Bryant School in Alexandria, VA. There was no equipment or demonstration facility at the time, and Savoy remembers that Bonnie Klein was the first demonstrator the club had because she could bring

precious beads.



Display Your Box

An impressive collection of woodturned boxes will be on display at the 2017 AAW Symposium in Kansas City. After the Symposium, the boxes will be delivered to Beads of Courage.



Anyone can create and donate a handmade box.

If you're attending the Symposium, you can bring your box with you and deliver it to the Beads of Courage area in Bartle Hall B. If you are not able to attend the event, you may ship your handmade box to: **AAW KC Symposium - Attention: Beads of Courage, Woodcraft Store, Charlie Wilson, 8645 Bluejacket, Lenexa, KS 66214** (prior to June 16).



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[Beads of Courage website.](#)

her small portable lathe.

Savoy noticed that the Bryant School - an alternative high school - had a fully equipped wood shop that had been idle for years. He offered to restore the shop to full capability if CAW could use the space for workshops and demonstrations. The school agreed, and Bryant has been the principal meeting space for CAW since 1999.

For 12 years, Savoy coordinated turning demonstrations at regional Woodworking Shows and has served as long-time Operations Director of CAW, where he has been on the board since 1999, when the organization had nearly 300 members - the largest chapter in the American Association of Woodturners at the time. The club has spun off at least three other chapters, including ones in Winchester, VA; Frederick and Montgomery County, MD; and the [Cactoctin Turners in Virginia](#).

Savoy recognized the need for more hands-on instruction for both new and experienced turners, and in 1997 he worked with Don Riggs and Frank Jessup to start the CAW Skill Enhancement Program, which still continues several days a month. He also taught turning for six years at the Woodcraft store in Springfield, VA, and assisted Riggs with adult education classes in Bryant's shop.

After the September 11th attacks in 2001, area woodturners and carvers were approached by veterans' hospitals to make wooden canes to give to wounded returning troops. Savoy organized a campaign - known as the Eagle Cane Project - that produced 400 canes, of which CA turned more than a hundred himself.

Savoy also engineered the Mount Vernon Project, a historic turning drive to salvage useful objects from a 218-year-old white ash tree that had been planted by George Washington on his estate in Virginia. When the tree was damaged in a hurricane in 2003, CAW was asked if members could turn pieces from a section of the tree that had come down. By July of 2004, the club had produced dozens of bowls, vases, and platters used as commemorative gifts to major donors to the Mount Vernon restoration work.

Savoy, who markets Oneway lathe accessories, also is known as a master toolmaker, and over the years has designed and manufactured a variety of gouges and scrapers that have been eagerly purchased by local turners. Savoy says the tools he makes are "only a sideline" that responds to the needs of turners who want custom-made tools.

[Instructions & specifications.](#)



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is an online learning experience that introduces the art and craft of woodturning to visitors. Discover Woodturning enables the general public to learn about woodturning, its origins, appeal, and how to get started. [Check out Discover Woodturning.](#)



Woodturning FUNDamentals

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Phil Brown, a founder of CAW and a prominent woodturning artist, gives Savoy the credit for sustaining and building woodturning in the national capital area. "C.A. just works tirelessly on behalf of the turning community, and he does it all quietly and with good grace," says Brown. "He also demands discipline and safety, and those high standards are responsible more than any other reason for the enthusiasm that countless turners have for woodturning."

~ Stan Wellborn

Honoring Our Wounded Heroes

By Neil Kagan

It is a simple gesture in contrast to such heroic action. A cane, turned on a lathe and topped with a handle carved in the shape of an eagle's head, is presented to a wounded warrior. "This cane is not to be seen as any sign of weakness," says Hank Cloutier, coordinator of the Eagle Cane Project for the Washington, D.C. area, to the recipient. "It is a sign of respect and honor and thanks for your personal sacrifice."

According to Cloutier, an Air Force retiree, cane-presentation ceremonies date back to the Civil War. The eagle carved into the cane is symbolic, Cloutier explains: "Native Americans believed when a warrior falls on the battlefield his spirit will return as an eagle."

On this cold Sunday in January, the Walter Reed Army Medical Center is packed with wounded warriors, their families, and young children. "We're fighting an enemy you can't see," says David Nieves, who was injured near Camp Liberty in Baghdad. "We are fighting a ghost you don't see." Nieves, like other soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, found that his armored vehicle offered little protection against IEDs, or improvised explosive devices. Unfortunately, he adds, "explosives cut through the armor like paper."

In spite of all they have been through, many of the soldiers at the presentation ceremony remain

The Capital Area Woodturners and Northern Virginia Carvers created these Eagle Canes for soldiers at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center. The eagle, strong and powerful, has come to embody the spirit of freedom in America. According to legend at one of the first battles of the American Revolution, the noise of the early morning struggle awakes the sleeping eagles. They flew raucously from their nests and circled over the heads of the fighting men. The patriots looked up and said "they are shrieking for freedom."

hopeful. Sgt. First Class Confeior Montanez looks forward to returning to his family in Puerto Rico after 33 years in the Army, including time spent in Special Forces. Pfc. Michael Dinkel, who lost his leg in Afghanistan when an explosion sent the transmission of his vehicle hurtling through the floorboard and out the roof, is walking well on his titanium leg and hopes to be back running

"You have given me not only a much-needed tool, necessary for my mobility, but also a constant reminder, as I walk with your cane, of the goodness that lies in the hearts of mankind.... A reminder that what I did, sacrificed, and physically and mentally gave of myself, mattered."

—Sgt. First Class Gordon L. Ewell

soon. Ray Nennagir, who lost both his legs in an explosion near Zaidon, Iraq, takes heart from the presence of his wife and child, who have been at his side during his recovery at Walter Reed.

The soldiers treasure the eagle canes and feel honored that thoughtful Americans have taken the time to handcraft an object that, like the Purple Hearts awarded them, will stand as mementos of their service and sacrifice. One of the cane recipients, Sgt. First Class Gordon L. Ewell, wrote what he described as a very humble thank-you:

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To read more about the Eagle Cane Project click [here](#).
(Requires AAW member login with username and password.)

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