

# Behind the Scenes

with Kurt Hertzog



## Woodcraft

If you are a woodturner or woodworker, the name Woodcraft is probably familiar to you. You may even have a Woodcraft franchise in your town, or if not, you may deal with them through the Internet or their catalog. Probably the two striking things about the Woodcraft company are their big green Woodcraft logo and the statue of a Native American carving a wooden pole.

*The First American Woodworker* was commissioned by Woodcraft to commemorate their 50th anniversary in 1978. The entire body of the Native American and the stump were carved from a single block of pine. Thinned down from a 48" diameter piece, it was completed in a little more than a year by American sculptor Armand LaMontagne. The finished sculpture is five feet tall, 30" by 34" square, and weighs in at 700 pounds.

Woodcraft began in Boston in 1928. Originally a one-room shop, it was dedicated to selling new and rebuilt woodworking machinery to cabinetmakers and schools. By the 1950s, they had not only taken on the Boice Crane Bench Machines dealership, but also Rockwell Delta. By 1958, Woodcraft became the first retailer for the Marples hand-tool line. Still a small retailer, a mention in the *Whole Earth Catalog* in the 60s fired up the mail-order business, and as they say, "The rest is history."

In the 1980s, Sam Ross, an avid woodworker and customer of Woodcraft, bought the company. Sam's experience with retail stores helped drive the company to open more stores around the country, and eventually the distribution and customer service center was relocated to Parkersburg, West Virginia. In the late 1990s, Woodcraft added franchise locations, and the first franchise was situated in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Now with over eighty stores in thirty-six states, the company reach is through retail outlets, catalog, and the Internet. The hub of all this continues to be in Parkersburg, West Virginia.

There are three main facilities in Parkersburg. The corporate offices are located in an office complex on a high hill just outside of town. That site houses the corporate staff from the president through the product development folks. Buying, accounting, advertising, and all the central functions are on-site and literally only steps from each other. It is a tight-knit group with a great deal of interaction. Everywhere you go, there are reminders of what their

business is. If it isn't woodworking tools for evaluation that are evident, it is tools and equipment for the employees to become more familiar with and to use to develop their skills.

Not too far down the road is the corporate-owned store. This store is much like the other Woodcraft stores that are found around the country. The display fixtures, customer signage, and general layout are all the same. This store functions not only as a retail store, but also as a training facility for the franchise owners, and new franchisees spend time here learning the Woodcraft system.

Right next door to the corporate store is the home of *Woodcraft magazine*. The staff there is responsible for the creation and publishing of the six issues a year woodworking magazine. Jim Harrold and his staff have one of the finest woodworking shops just downstairs. The shop is an absolute showcase with nearly everything that a woodturner or woodworker could wish for. The magazine photos and video materials are shot there, and the projects are made there. Though it may look immaculate, make no mistake, real woodturning and woodworking takes place there. Well lit and well equipped, it is an ideal place to create the projects and photos needed for the magazine.

Adjacent to the workshop is the telephone center, which houses the customer service personnel. Like all the other Woodcraft staff, their offices are also adorned with their woodturning and woodworking projects.

The third complex in the Parkersburg area is the warehouse merchandise distribution center. This operation does the receiving, warehousing, and order fulfillment of the merchandise. Similar to other shipping and receiving areas, there is a big truck yard for both deliveries and pickups. Order picking, packing, and shipping for the retail customer takes place here, as well as product shipping to the retail stores—the only difference is the size of the package.

The technical services group is located in offices in one corner of the warehouse. This quiet set of offices contains the staff you'll speak to if you have questions or problems with any particular product purchased from Woodcraft. The technical specialists have almost all the various products right at their fingertips as they answer your questions. If they don't have that particular model or

part number right at hand, it is only moments away in the warehouse.

Seeing all the pieces of the operation and how they play together, you'll begin to understand how you can order your desired product from their e-mail, website, or catalog and it will magically show up at your front door in a few days. With everything from retail operations support, merchandising, advertising, publishing, product development, order fulfillment, and more, there is a lot happening in Parkersburg, West Virginia.



**Fig. 1.** High on a hilltop in the foggy mountains of West Virginia sits the Woodcraft Corporate Headquarters.



**Fig. 2.** The lobby has a hutch with woodworking projects and an assortment of wooden chairs made by employees and friends.



**Fig. 3.** The chairs are well built and are there to use; they are not just for looks.



**Fig. 4.** President Jeff Forbes takes great pride in having employees who are woodturners and woodworkers.



**Fig. 5.** *The First American Woodworker*, which was commissioned by Woodcraft in 1978 to celebrate their 50th anniversary, is right outside Jeff's office.



**Fig. 6.** In every aisle and room, there are products being used for evaluation and employee education.



**Fig. 9.** There is a Woodcraft store in town only a few miles from the corporate headquarters that serves as not only a retail store, but also a franchisee training facility.



**Fig. 7.** Ben Bice, the turning product manager, has his desk covered with items that need to be tested and evaluated.



**Fig. 10.** The store has the typical look and feel of the other facilities around the country, but can be used as a test ground for new display ideas.

**Fig. 8.** All the employees are encouraged to become woodworkers. Here, Amanda Silvers from accounting shows off her first turning.



**Fig. 11.** Next door to the Woodcraft store are the offices of Woodcraft magazine. Here is the conference room with the work in progress for an upcoming edition.

**Fig. 12.** The magazine's Editor-In-Chief, Jim Harrold, is showing his and the staff's foray into woodturning.



**Fig. 15.** The warehousing and shipping building is located in a third complex across town, where mail order, Internet orders, and store shipments are packed and shipped.



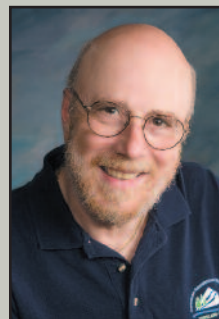
**Fig. 13.** Their workshop/studio/test facility is beneath the magazine's offices; it has just about everything a woodworker or woodturner could wish for.



**Fig. 16.** The technical services group is adjacent to the warehouse.



**Fig. 14.** While immaculate, it is a working shop for project creation, as well as photographing and videotaping these projects.



### **Kurt Hertzog**

A professional woodturner, demonstrator, and teacher, Kurt Hertzog enjoys the continuum of woodturning, from making his own turning tools to photographing his finished turnings.

Kurt is a regular feature columnist for *Woodturning Design* magazine, one of the five Council Members of the Pen Makers Guild, and a member of the Board of Directors of the American Association of Woodturners.

Kurt's work has been featured in the American Association of Woodturners "Rounding the Corners" Exhibit, and he has been published in *Woodturning Design*, *American Woodturner*, *Pen World*, and *Stylus* magazines. You can see his work on his website at [www.kurthertzog.com](http://www.kurthertzog.com).