

Behind the Scenes

with Kurt Hertzog



Craft Supplies USA

One of the most widely recognized woodturning suppliers sits nestled on a quiet side street in Provo, Utah. Craft Supplies USA—or more commonly known as The Woodturners Catalog—is housed in a small two-story brick building surrounded by a number of prefab steel buildings that have been added as the company has grown. The company was founded in 1982 by Darrel Nish and had only a single part-time employee at that time—his mom, who served as bookkeeper. Over the years, the company has grown to about thirty employees, but it is still a “small” family-run business with Darrel, three of his children, two sons-in-law, and even his well-known father, Dale Nish, working there part-time. As woodturning has grown, so have the number of suppliers—with that number currently in the hundreds. Even with all the competition, the three-times-a-year catalog from Craft Supplies has become *THE* reference for woodturners.

Mainly a mail-order supplier, Craft Supplies has a strong web presence as well. The walk-in trade (along with the traveling wood show booths) only accounts for 5% of the business—the balance is catalog and web-based. Because the Internet and catalog are so important, Craft Supplies has their own in-house catalog creation and photography staff, as well as a web operations group.

Just about everyone in the small company wears multiple hats. For example, along with being president of the company, Darrel is responsible for the catalog as well. Rex Burningham teaches, works with the traveling show operations, and heads up technical services and product development. Each of the other staff members has a variety of responsibilities. They even become food service workers at the annual open house cookout on the Wednesday before the Provo-based Symposium. The Craft Supplies “Super Wednesday” has become a must-attend event held the day before the start of the Utah Woodturning Symposium. The free, day-long event features demonstrations, hands-on product testing, door prize drawings, and a clearance sale that rivals the after-Thanksgiving “Black Friday” retail shopping frenzy.

A big supporter of the American Association of Woodturners, Craft Supplies USA makes over \$100K in donations to the local chapters. This, along with club discounts, is part of their effort to support and grow the woodturning community. Since many secondary schools have cut the hands-on Industrial Arts programs, the next generation of woodturners is at risk. Without exposure to woodturning in woodshop, what will be the trigger to introduce people to woodturning? That is an important impe-

tus for Craft Supplies traveling operations—by sponsoring demos and hands-on turning at the various wood show events, the non-turning public is exposed to woodturning.

Seeing the huge, professional-looking *Woodturners Catalog* gives you the impression that Craft Supplies USA is much larger than it really is. The small company enjoys having that reach and public perception. It strives to have a full line of products and fast service, and to be a leader in product development. Should you ever find yourself in Provo, Utah, take the time to visit Craft Supplies USA. You'll be welcomed heartily, and more likely than not, you'll see Darrel, Dale, Rex, or Ben—and one of them may even wait on you.



Fig. 1. It is a rare woodturner who isn't familiar with Craft Supplies USA or *The Woodturners Catalog*.



Fig. 2. Craft Supplies USA is in a two-story brick building surrounded by several additional prefab steel buildings.



Fig. 3. Though there is a showroom, it is relatively small and can only host a small percentage of the product offerings.



Fig. 6. Technical questions might be fielded by Rex Burningham, who heads the technical services and product development.



Fig. 4. Because of its catalog roots, the company is geared for prompt fulfillment of catalog orders.

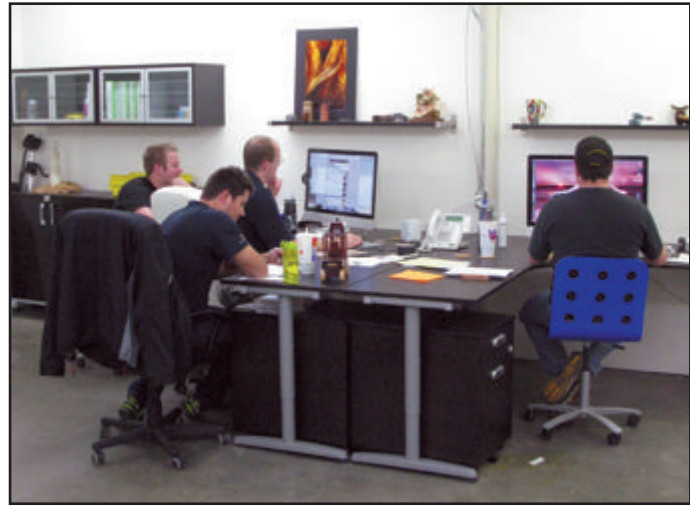


Fig. 7. The web has become increasingly important, and there are designated staff members who deal with the web and catalog aspect of the business.



Fig. 5. You're probably going to speak to one of these helpful operators if you phone in your order.



Fig. 8. There is an onsite photographic studio whose staff does all the catalog and web product photography.



Fig. 9. You can pick out turning blanks and do some lathe shopping if you visit Craft Supplies in person.



Fig. 12. Craft Supplies offers multiday and week-long, hands-on classes with world class instructors, such as Richard Raffan.



Fig. 10. Craft Supplies also hosts the meeting for the local AAW chapter.



Fig. 13. The classes offer top-shelf facilities with plenty of personal attention from the instructors.



Fig. 11. Rex Burningham (Product Development Director), Darrel Nish (President), and Ben Williams (General Manager) (left to right) review the latest catalog.



Fig. 14. Dale Nish is often a visitor to the classes and almost always joins in for the class graduation lunch.