



Guest editor's letter

Kurt Hertzog

Are woodturners a dying breed?

I'm sure you have noticed the age of our turning population is getting older. As time goes on, the turning community continues to be getting smaller. Even with any newcomer influx, it is a seemingly sparse replacement group. I'm reminded of the buggy whip manufacturers. Having a historically robust business that didn't take long to disappear with the advent of the automobile.

Is woodturning on the same trajectory? While there are some younger people coming into woodturning, the bulk of the newcomers are usually middle-aged adults or those entering retirement who have developed a curiosity as they find themselves with the time and some disposable income to spend on a hobby. Almost without fail, these are men who had some woodturning experience in their youth. Most often, it was from woodshop classes in their secondary school days. With a basics class or a visit to a turning club meeting, they usually fall solidly into one of two camps. They either realise that they don't have sufficient interest to continue to dive in or they are smitten and go full tilt into the hobby.

Part of the problem as I see it is that shop class is ancient history for most of the school systems. Whether instruction time needed for other subjects, insufficient shop class skilled instructors, funding shortfalls for shop classrooms and equipment, and certainly the liability issues are all contributors to the disappearance of these hands-on trade skill classes. Without the teaser classes from their youth, the source of new recruits into woodturning will likely continue to dwindle. Cell phones, computers, multi-player games, videos, one wheels, and myriad other distractions grab attention and consume spare time. The growing trend now is for more information workers and fewer trades or craftspeople. Without a concerted effort to attract new turners, youngsters through retirees, we are liable to find woodturning withering on the vine. It behoves all of us to make special efforts to encourage new turners.

Do your local symposia host special events for new (young or old) turners? Does your club have an outreach to local youth groups, whether through school, church, or civic associations? Do you have turning demos at local events? Without an ongoing effort to continually infeed new turners to our clubs, we could possibly be a historical footnote in the craft world. If you are part of an inclusion effort, great! What can you do bigger, better, faster, or more interestingly to entice new turners? Figure out some ideas and give them a try.



If you don't have a programme, start one. Make it a special point to welcome visitors to your club and mingle with them rather than ignoring them. Remember, you only get one chance to make a first impression. Visitors being ignored by the group at large during their initial meeting leaves a poor impression of the organisation. A few minutes' welcoming visitors, informally and formally, goes a long way to making them feel that your club is a place that's comfortable and inclusive. All these actions cost nearly nothing, and without a continuing effort by all the current turners, we might just be among the dodos one day. Best, **Kurt**



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