

## Features

# Carver's works sought by tourists and collectors

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TOBERMORY — Wilmer Nadjiwon remembers the day he threw away his watch.

About 20 years ago Nadjiwon said goodbye to life in logging camps and became the Indian Carver.

Today the 67-year-old Cape Croker Reserve resident spends his days shaping wood into statues he describes as "stylized nature" and selling his wares out of a small plywood hut on Highway 6 just outside Tobermory.

Working from a picture in his head, Nadjiwon said he threw away his watch and lunch box, sat down and went into business for himself.

The watch was the last one he owned.

Standing amid a collection of carvings ranging from a finely polished likeness of a humming bird in flight to a rough statue depicting an Indian legend of a man and a wolf-like creature locked in battle, he said "I don't care what time it is."

But originally the job came up out of necessity.

"I was hungry," he said, adding he needed a way to put food on the table.

The first sale came when a carving he'd done, modelled after his son, was sent to Ottawa and sold for \$15.

"I thought it was great," he laughed.

Now Nadjiwon's work is sought after by the parade of tourists through his tiny outlet as well as collectors across the country. A small, unassuming sign nailed to a tree directs customers, including many return visitors, to the shop.

Last summer, Nadjiwon made the trek from the Bruce Peninsula all the way to Vancouver to take part in Expo 86.

The craftsman spent nine days on the site representing Indian wood carvers from Ontario. The outcome of the expedition, called "The Dancer," still stands in Nadjiwon's home.

When the inspiration for a piece hits, usually while Nadjiwon is relaxing or getting ready for bed, he draws a rough sketch of it and then mulls it over in his

head for a few weeks to decide the best way to approach the subject.

The medium for the sculpture is usually hard wood. Delicate fingers and intricate animal paws alike are shaped by chisel.

Although his craft was self taught, Nadjiwon attributes his years working in the forest cutting down trees with teaching him about wood.

To make a sculpture work the grain of the wood has to be considered before any of the actual sculpting takes place.

"You can only cut it in certain directions. You may want a hand to hold a knife a certain way, but if the grain isn't right you can't do it," he said.

The main concern for the veteran carver is making sure the craft is passed on to future generations.

Nadjiwon said he hopes to start a class this winter on the reserve to teach people how to work with wood.

The program, he said, would help alleviate unemployment while teaching a marketable skill.



Sun Times photo by Terry Weber

Indian Carver Wilmer Nadjiwon, and some of his works