

Carving hobby now profession

OHSWEKEN — A few weeks ago I stopped at a restaurant outside of Hagersville around lunch time. Inside, I happened to strike up a conversation with an old acquaintance of mine, Jerry Jonathan. His daughter, Carla, had been a student of mine some years ago when she was in Grade 4. I remember her as a pretty little girl and smart as a whip.

At that time Jerry was an ironworker, but over the years he has turned himself into an artist. At first his soap stone carvings were so special to him he wanted to keep them all himself. After a while he began to give a few away as gifts to his family for birthdays and at Christmas. Besides his wife, Sandy, and daughters, Carla and Michele, he has numerous brothers sisters, nieces, nephews and cousins.

Jerry comes from an artistic family. Some of the women in the extended Jonathan family do beautiful native crafts and his brother, Garfield, and nephew, Kelly, are also masters at carving. He works at several sculptures at a time and sometimes leaves one for several days while he decides what to do with it next.

This youthful looking 52-year old is a self-taught sculptor but he admits to receiving a few tips from his friend and fellow artist, David General. He has advanced from working with soft soap stone to carving marble, alabaster and serpentine, which are all considerably harder.

Because he was starting an exhibition the next day at Elmhurst, near Ingersoll, he

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had about 20 examples of his work on hand at his home. This is more than the usual number because they are more likely to be out at various art galleries than at his place. He invited me to come over to view them.

Jerry lives near the corner known as Silver Star on the Second Line of the Six Nations Indian Reserve. He is a Tuscarora of the Turtle Clan the same as his nephew Stan Jonathan of National Hockey League. You remember that Stan was also good with his hands.

Thus far Jerry has carved close to 300 pieces of sculpture. They range from very stylized eagles to more realistic whales. One of my favorites was an eagle head carved on a moose antler with a marble base.

Each finished piece of sculpture is numbered according to the subject. For example, his latest bird subject, an eagle, is number 051. He also keeps the name and address of each buyer. Carving was once just a hobby with Jerry Jonathan but this native artist now runs a very professional operation.

Our Town is an Expositor feature which provides a forum for news and views from some of the smaller centres in the region. George Beaver is a Six Nations resident and was a teacher and principal on the Six Nations a New Credit reserves for years.