# Rewards of starting a Woodturning Chapter

By Ron Browning

Why would anyone want to start an AAW chapter?

Besides being lots of fun and rewarding, there are several reasons. You may be new to turning and just can't find a chapter near your home. Or maybe there isn't a local chapter within driving distance of your new home. Or perhaps your chapter is a victim of its own success—you've outgrown your meeting space and need to split off into two groups.

Whatever the reason, I encourage you to forge ahead. Here's a brief outline of how the Hands-on Woodturners started.

### Driving force

Almost a year after visiting the Florida West Coat Woodturners (FWCWT) booth at a tool show, I came across the club's tri-fold brochure. An upcoming meeting date jumped right off the page. As a woodworker who recently rediscovered turning, I didn't care that it was a two-hour drive to St. Petersburg. So off I went.

What I found was a nice bunch of folks. There were pieces on display that didn't have any tool marks! The bottom of the bowls were turned and finished! I had reached woodturning nirvana! Also attending for the first time was a fellow that had moved down recently from way up north. He had looked up the chapter in the resource guide (no idea what he was talking about). Then the guy from up north—Norm Rose—asked if anyone wanted to see how to use the skew.

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Although I wasn't a member of a secret society, I must have fallen into one because I was certain that no one knew how to use the skew. But Norm made it as simple as ABC (Anchor, Bevel, Cut!). That night—after the two-hour drive home—I was in my shop using the skew for the first time successfully.

### Jumping into chapter activities

At that meeting in St. Petersburg, I picked up an AAW membership application, and promptly joined. I immediately got involved with the St. Pete chapter, including a demo at the second meeting that I attended. Before long, I talked up the FWCWT to anyone that looked like they might have an interest to woodturning.

When I told people from the Tampa Bay area that I drove two hours for a meeting, they told me it was just too far to drive. So I started collecting names. I also promised potential members that if anything closer came up, that I would give them a call. In the meantime, I got information from the AAW office on starting a chapter.

Several months later, Ken Jackman contacted me. Ken said that he was moving into the Tampa Bay area and wanted to know where the local chapter meetings were held. I told him about the St. Pete chapter—just 2 1/2 hours from his new address. There was a long silence on the phone, followed by, "Are you sure that there isn't anything closer?" I assured him that there wasn't and that he could ride with me to the next meeting.

### Starting from scratch

I finally met Ken, and he immediately started talking about forming a local chapter. I let him know that I already had the AAW paperwork—and a list of names. We set a date for the first meeting and Ken started calling the names we had collected. Judy Jackman submitted news items to local papers, inviting anyone interested in learning more about woodturning to join us.

### First meeting

Our first meeting drew nine members—an encouraging start. When Judy suggested a chapter name—Hands-On Woodturners—at our second meeting, 10 turners and three spouses applauded.

Thanks to Ken and Judy, we soon applied for local chapter status, elected officers (Ken was our first president), and began organizing our own special events.

We opened a lot of eyes when more than 20 turners showed up to watch Elvie Jackson at our first demonstration. Shortly after that Larry Hasiak, an AAW board member at the time, presented a program on the benefits of AAW membership. Then Dave Barriger, a former AAW president, contacted us and offered to give us an all-day demo and tree identification walk at Rainbow Springs State Park.

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**No looking back**

Since that first meeting in 1999 with just nine members, we've now grown to more than 100 members. Yes, it did stretch us to make phone calls, write by-laws, and find an initial core of dedicated volunteers.

But the effort was worth it. Hands-On Woodturners now owns a lathe, a covered trailer, video recording system, and huge library of books and videos. And, of course, we have a growing support group of generous, sharing woodturners within a short driving distance.

## 11 More tips for starting a chapter

- You'll need two or more leaders to drive the formation of a chapter. Attempting to do this solo will lead to early burnout and limit the number of worthy ideas.
- Contact the AAW office (www.woodturner.org; 651-484-9094) for a packet of information on starting a chapter. You'll receive a sample set of by-laws, insurance information, and organization and promotion ideas. On request, the AAW office will send a packet for applying for a 501(c)3 charitable organization status for the Internal Revenue Service.
- Before you announce your first gathering, have a site arranged for your initial three or four meetings. Many existing chapters meet in schools, community centers, and woodworking stores.
- Refer to your AAW Resource Directory for current AAW members within a two-hour drive of your meeting site. Don't be surprised if potential members already belong to one chapter.
- At least two weeks before your meeting, send public service announcements to surrounding newspapers. Check your library for a complete list of papers.
- In addition to mailing information about the chapter start-up, consider flyers or posters at home centers, lumberyards, tool stores, trade schools, and adult education centers.
- Put up woodturning displays in libraries, community centers, and other community locations in the community where there is a lot of traffic.
- Be sure to let other local wood-related clubs (wood-working, carving and so forth) know of your plans to organize a turning chapter.
- Beginning with your first meeting, be prepared to maintain accurate financial records. After you elect a treasurer, he or she will appreciate your early efforts.
- When you outline your initial demonstrations, ask attendees for topics that would attract a wide range of skill levels.
- Ask for volunteers at the meetings. Camaraderie will flourish when more members have an active role.

If this article has created any interest for you to start your own local chapter, please contact:
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