

# The Cutting Edge

Volume III Issue II

March 1995

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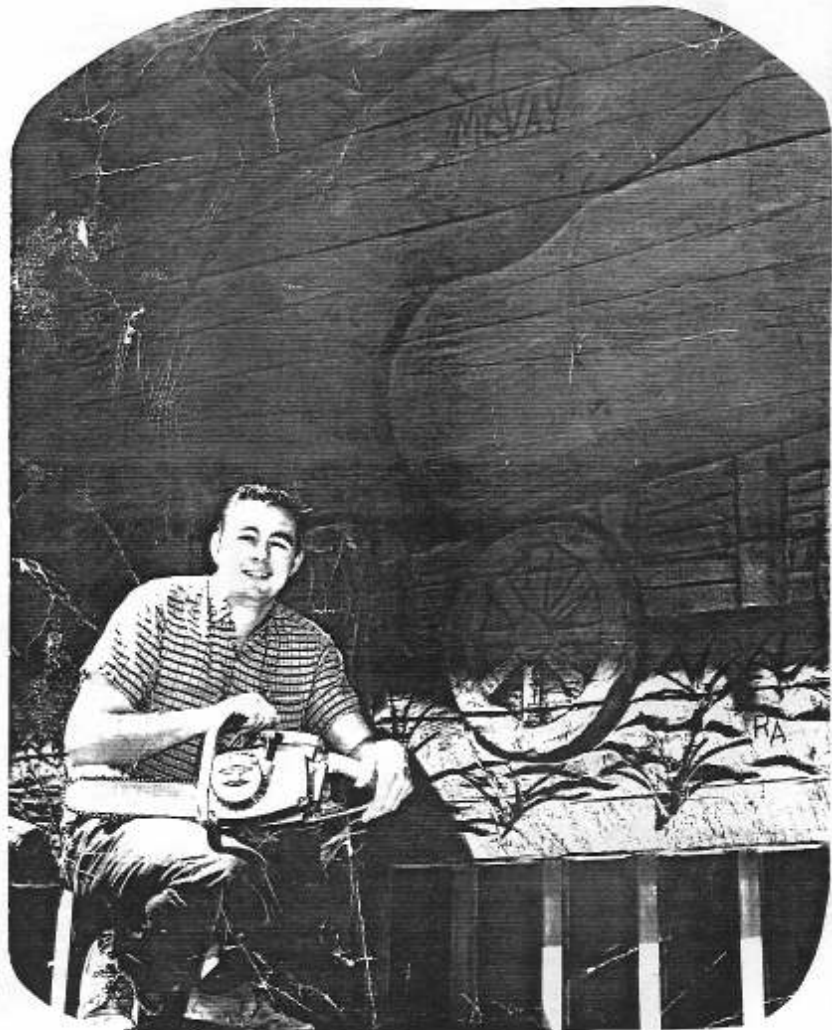
**Mike McVay, A Carving Pioneer**

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### **Cover Photo:**

*Mike McVay at the 1964 World's Fair  
New York City, Oregon Building  
The background is one of five  
depicting Oregon history*



## THE CUTTING EDGE

is published bi monthly by the  
**Cascade Chainsaw Sculptors Guild,**  
a Washington State Non-profit  
Professional Organization  
7371 S. Holst Rd.  
Clinton, Washington 98236  
360/ 579-7811

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Membership      \$20.00/yr.

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is edited and produced by

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7371 S. Holst Rd.  
Clinton, WA 98236  
360/ 579-7811

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### New Members

The Cutting Edge,

You "guys" are doing a great job. Please give me a subscription to your newsletter. Your new member.

*Ben Risney  
Spring City, PA*

Dear Cutting Edge

What a great newsletter. I love to see a sense of humor in these other wise dreary carving publications. Nice format also.

I would like to see articles on wood - how much to pay? What types? Info on tools, techniques and more about carvers styles and what makes for an interesting carving. ie. The Ray Murphy article by Pat McVay was excellent.

*Michael J. Feeney  
Mt. Horeb, WI*

*Editors Note:*

*Thanks for the information. Good ideas. I'll try and cover alot of the issues mentioned above in 1995. But I'm always interested in people sending articles to me about anything. By sending in information, suggestions, articles, news, you get a better newsletter. Does anyone out there want to write a tool review column? Articles on different wood types?*

Dear Cascade Chainsaw Sculptors Guild,

I would first like to thank the guild for the recognition as "National Top Point" carner in competition for 1994.

For this recognition, I have worked hard. It has been a challenge each and every competition, as I've progressed, so have my fellow competitors! With these competitions comes titles. By using my titles, I have gained major sponsorship, state wide newspaper coverage and national recognition. Use your titles!

With more and more competitions each year, (no matter what the size) we're (CCSG) opening the eyes of galleries, art collectors and business representatives.

Chain saw art is being acknowledge as ART, not just lawn ornaments.

April and I have gained alot of new friends and good memories from 1994. We're expecting 1995 to be just as challenging and full of new friendships and more memories.

*Don Etue  
94 State Chain saw Artist Champion*

## From the Editor

Hi Ya'll

I'd like to apologize for the Cutting Edge being late. I have a couple good reasons. Working on a computer you need to constantly save your work. I didn't do that. Had a little power blip. Lost all the hard work I did that day. I learn as I go. I also went down south, to Florida, Bahamas, etc., on a carving expedition, too busy working.

Met alot of nice people down south. I want to personally thank fellow carver Rick Travers of Palm Bay, Florida for all his help along with a whole lot of other people, Lynn, Chuck, Harvey, Trish, Gavin, Flo, Jane and Craig. The hospitality of the South is truly generous.

Alot of neat woods in Florida. Tried a variety of different kinds. Cypress, water oak, coconut, acacia, camphor, melaluca (caused a reaction), pine and avocado. The cypress is in the cedar family which is what we carve here. It's very similar. It's hard to get because it's a protected species. I was most impressed with the camphor, and the Florida Pine which is also called loblolly, slash, or pitch pine. I'm sure there's a few other names for it. The camphor was like carving butter and it's very aromatic. This wood is used in the making of Camphophenique. Plus it's beautiful wood and a natural insecticide against bugs. The Florida pine is somewhat hard, and there's a little pitch to deal with but once your carving is done, it virtually will not crack hardly at all. With all that pitch in it, it dries really hard. The old timers say that "once it dries, you can hardly drive a nail through it".

That's my report, lets hear from you, tell me about the woods you carve and what you think about it. I hope you enjoy this issue. This is a special one because we're focusing on the early history of one chain saw wood carver - Mike McVay. He is one of the first chain saw wood carvers. Started in late 1950's. He spawned alot of carvers here in the Northwest and I'm sure around the country. He carved in 1964 New York World's Fair. If you know of any carvers that started around then or earlier or who got you started, please write. I would like to hear your story.

*Jessie Groeschel*

## CALENDAR of EVENTS

### MARCH

March 25, 26 KXLE - Central Washington Chainsaw Carving Contest, Ellensburg, WA. Contact Dan Whited 206/ 884-9534

### MAY

3rd Annual Irrigation Days Carving Contest, Sequim, WA. Contact Dennis Doran, 4701 Sequim Dungeness Way, Sequim, WA 98382 360/ 683-2597

May 20 Idaho City, Idaho. Contact Rae Bennet, PO Box 164, Idaho City, Idaho 83631, 208/ 392-4416

May 20, 21 Bucks County Chainsaw Sculpture Contest, Doylestown, Pennsylvania. Contact Bill Plant, 4366 US HWY 202, Doylestown, PA 18901, 215/ 794-8268

### JUNE

3rd Annual Maple Valleys Days Carving Contest, Maple Valley, WA. Contact Steve Backus 360/ 579-3574.

2nd Annual Washington Coast Championships, Ocean Shores, WA. Contact Don or April Etue. 509/ 722-6169

June 17 Idaho City, Idaho. Contact Rae Bennet, 208/ 392-4416

### JULY

6th Annual Northeastern Regional Carving Championships, Tupper Lake, NY. contact Hal MacIntosh, Route 214, Lanesville, NY 12450. 914/ 688-7875

July 15 Idaho City, Idaho. Contact Rae Bennet, 208/ 392-4416

### AUGUST

August 4-6 - 6th Annual West Coast Championships, Nautical themed at Westport, WA. Contact Steve Backus, 360/ 579-3574. Prizes will be at least the same as last year.

August 5, 6 Tall Timber Days Festival, Grand Rapids, MN. Carvers invited to carve. Contest on the 5th. Sign up deadline is July 1. Entry Fee \$50.00, limited to 12 carvers Contact Tall Timber Days Festival, Jerry Sweet, PO Box 134, Grand Rapids, MN 55744, 218/ 326-0976. Prizes, 1st Place \$500, 2nd Place \$400, 3rd Place \$300, 4th Place \$200, 5th Place \$100

August 19 Idaho City, Idaho. Contact Rae Bennet, 208/ 392-4416

### SEPTEMBER

Sept. 16 Idaho City, Idaho. Contact Rae Bennet, 208/ 392-4416

### OCTOBER

3rd Annual Carving Contest, Shelton, WA. Contact Charlie Hubbard, E, 1161 Mason Lk. Rd. 2, Shelton, WA 98584. 360/ 426-3038

### DECEMBER

2nd Annual McClenden's Hardware & Samco Christmas Carving Contest. Contact Carla Goudy at Samco, 206/ 537-6263

## Mike McVay, A Chain Saw Carving Pioneer

By: Jessie Groeschel & Pat McVay

In the late 1950's Mike McVay had his first taste of chain saw art. In 1957 an old school friend of his showed him a tiki carved with a chain saw. He was amazed.

During this time Mike was doing some diving work for his father, Dee McVay. This was on the Oregon Coast. He was salvaging wood from the bottom of a lake to create a state park. He took an axe and hacked out a face on a stump. Dee suggested a chain saw. It was a big heavy saw with 1" teeth but soon there was an assortment of big faces on the lake's edge.

During 1960 Mike read about a company in Washington State creating carved furniture with chain saws. It gave him the idea that someone could actually make money at it. So he put together some carvings and was going to put them in an arts & crafts show. On the way there he fell asleep at the wheel and wound up in the hospital. It was a very serious car accident where he almost lost his life. All his bones on his left side were broken and his eyeball fell out of his socket. The doctors were able to pop it back in. He still can see out of it. He spent 3 months in traction. After he got out of the hospital, he continued to carve. He carved a line of small animals and

decorative artwork. Soon he had a thriving business in the Willamette Valley of Oregon.

In 1963, Mike and Dee went on a trip down the west coast he met Ken Kaiser, who was busy creating the famous "Trees of Mystery" in Northern California. Mike was impressed and inspired by the giant proportions of his work.



Mike McVay, left, with Timber Queen and friend around the feet of Paul Bunyon, Albany Timber Carnival 1964

In 1963 Mike was in the Albany Timber Carnival in which he carved a 30 foot tall sculpture of Paul Bunyon. It was 9 1/2 feet wide at the base. He was invited by Governor Mark Hatfield of Oregon to go to the 1964 New York Worlds Fair. They were sending a lumberjack show and he and Ken Kaiser were to carve there.

While in New York, Mike was even featured on the popular game show at the time "What's My Line" and was a big hit. Virtually no one had even heard about chain saw carving or seen it done. Today it's more common. It was even



Mike McVay & Kenyon Kaiser with a wood bust of Ken's wife, 1964

more incredible back then. The saws were heavier, longer and many carvers didn't have the luxury of using a carving bar.

Business grew. He couldn't keep up with the demands for his carving. He hired a fellow to help him. Mike would carve during the day and his help would finish his stuff at night. It worked good until his help got tired one night and fell asleep with a lit cigarette. The shop caught on fire. The guy was able to get out but there was so much wood and sawdust that the fire was out of control. It burned to the ground. Mike had no insurance. Feeling dejected and upset he decided to quit chain saw carving for a while and join his dad, Dee in Saudi Arabia. Dee McVay had a deep sea diving company in the Persian Gulf. Mike went there and worked for him diving in the Red Sea and Persian Gulf.

After working there, he took his savings and traveled around Europe. He settled down in Munich for a winter. Then in the spring time went to Paris and fell in love with the city. He was able to get a job teaching English. He also did voice overs in English for foreign films. His biggest accomplishments in Paris was his writing, directing, and acting.

With his writing and directing abilities a few of his plays were produced with some success. He even had a theater company called the Humptulips Shake & Shingle Theater Company. With his acting ability he was invited to go on a European tour with new American playwrights who were doing their world premieres in Europe. A lot of these writers are now successful playwrights with many of their plays appearing on Broadway. These playwrights include Langston Hughes, Israel Horowitz, Megan Terry, and Sam Shepard.

During this time he would carve once in while. His



Eggs - PAR LES BUCHERONS DE HUMPTULIPS  
A scene from the play "Eggs", written and directed by Mike McVay. This picture was first published in the French magazine Le Nouvel Observateur, 1975. Mike McVay is seated in the lower right hand corner, his brother Pat is behind him.



brother Pat joined him for awhile in Paris and lived with him for two years. This is where Pat got his start working with wood.

Mike returned to the United States in 1973. After living in Paris for eight years. He moved to Humptulips, Washington, right in the middle of the Olympic Rain Forest. The wood was plentiful and big here. It was impressive but the weather was lousy. The Olympic Rain Forest is one of the five rainiest spots in the world.

He resumed his carving career. He had discovered at this time, a company called Whitco had taken some of his early carvings and reproduced it without his permission. None of his stuff was copyrighted. Whitco was selling wood products and reproductions of his work around the world without recognition of his designs.

In 1976 he moved to Whidbey Island, Washington. His family started carving; his sisters Judy McVay, Eileen Willis, and his brother Pat McVay and many nephews (Steve Backus), nieces, daughters and son. They decided to join forces and with backing by their dad, Dee McVay, started the McVay Wood Carving Company. During this same year Whitco went out of business.

The McVay's had a chain saw production line going. They had a nice line of chain saw wood carved products. Every week they would ship off a big truck full of carvings to be sold to distributors, who would sell directly to the stores.

It was a thriving business with fourteen employees. Soon disaster again struck. Another cigarette smoker, visiting the warehouse threw his cigarette down into the wood pile. The shop burned down again. This time Mike was insured but he only got back one third of what the value of the place was worth. They rebuilt the shop, but by this time the family decided to go separate ways and pursue their careers individually.

During his time on Whidbey Island, Mike started the 1st World Championships Chain Saw carving contest at the Puyallup fairgrounds. This was 1981. This contest went on for a few years until the fair board started making to many demands - like keeping the carvings and then charging the carvers to be there, instead of the other way around. He also taught classes and inspired many other to start carving.

Today Mike still continues to carve, write, and act. He plans to write a book on carving. He splits his time between Whidbey Island, Washington and Alaska.

His advice for those starting out, "Keep at it. Keep learning and improving. Don't worry about your mistakes, unless you keep making the same ones over and over again."



Mike McVay in 1995. This carving is out of Sitka Spruce.

## Tales from the Cutting Edge

By: Jessie Groveschen

When Mike McVay went to the New York's Worlds Fair in 1964, he went with a delegation of loggers. Mike is 6'4" and he was the shortest one there. It was quite a sight to behold in the streets of New York City, these big tall guys, with their hickory shirts, red suspenders and big cork boots.

They worked hard all day and played equally hard at night. On one of the first nights they there, they went into a real busy bar. One of the loggers, 6' 11", 400 lbs. Bill Little, ordered a whiskey. Without even looking up, the bartender hands him a shot. Little said, "I want a real whiskey" at this point the bartender looks up and his eyes met about at Little's navel. He continued to look up and finally met Bill's face. Bill Little reaches over the bar, grabs the bottle of whiskey, pulls the cork out with his teeth and drank half the bottle. This was the start of the festivities. On another occasion, after a hard days work entertaining the New York City crowds (which is really hard work) they headed to a bar near the Expo which stayed open after hours. Mike not trusting to leave his saw anywhere, always carried it with him which was an old Pioneer. It was a night of fun, drinking, stories, and a time they would never forget. The fun time came to end, with the dawn of a new day. Mike headed for the subway, weary and tired. He got on the subway sat down and put his saw down by his feet.

He fell asleep through his stop and felt somebody shaking his shoulder. It was the subway conductor. They were at the end of the line. The subway man told him "pay attention. We're heading back. Don't miss your stop this time." Mike closed his eyes and every time the subway stopped he would open an eye to see if it was his exit. A gang of about four or five drunk guys got on. He didn't shut his eyes because these guys weren't the type to shut your eyes on. They were young late teens, early twenties. They were laughing and joking. Soon, they concentrated their thoughts on Mike, who was all alone. They started coming towards him, laughing, making fun of him. Mike started to worry, not sure what to do. Then he remembered that he had his saw with him. His saw was great. He would prime it once and it always started up. The gang got closer. Mike primed his saw. One guy pulled out a switch blade. Now was the time! "Don't fail me know." They were just a few feet away. Mike pulled on the cord and with a roar, the saw started. Mike stood up and stuck the saw into the back of the subway seat (which in those days was made out of wood, nice dry wood.) He sawed up through the seat aiming the spray and splinters at the gang. The gang was in shock. Those splinters must of hurt. Mike sat back down and left his saw running. The tension was high, exhaust filled the car and it seemed like time was standing still. The subway halted. It was the next stop. The door opened and the gang members emphatically climbed over each other to get out.

A huge gash was ripped in the wooden seat. Mike had learned a basic survival technique on how to commute on a late night, New York subway.

## A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Hi Folks,

Here we go, heading into the busy season or as busy as you want to be, I reckon. Some folks don't get up early enough to stay real busy but that's ok. To each his or her own just don't whine about how bad you got it.

Pat, Jessie, Nanette and I were down in the great state of Florida for the last couple of months. No contest in Tampa, but we had other things to keep us busy. Many thanks to Rick Travers for his help. Met some great folks, I'll tell you. Many many thanks to our new friends who seem like old friends. To our newest guild members, Chuck and Lynn Seitter. Thank you for putting us up and putting up with us. Harvey and Trish who had us over for lobster and a trip to the Mens' room for darts. Chucks' Dad, who loaned us stuff with the threat of instant death if we did not return it to his hands. "Hey youie", thanks! Gavin and Flo who got us wood, big, little and in between. Hope to see you all out here for the Westport Contest in August - the International Championships.

As I have stated before, the contests physically bring us together a handful of times a year. I always look forward to them. In fact, if I was a rich dude, I would just promote contests, but I'm not! Dan Whited, vice president and minister of fear has said the "Ellensburg contests money providers are tightening up like a chimp on cheese." So this could be the last one and the Ellensburg Home and Garden Show will be dismal and boring without the noise and excitement of a carving contest. When are these folk's going to figure out that we are doing them the favor, not the other way around. Plus you carver's out there, a new plan is afoot. Much like the old adage, take the best poacher in the country and make him the game warden. What we would like (or me anyway) is to take the folks who gripe the most about what we do and put them in charge of what they're griping about, like the judges, monies, promotions, etc. Because they seem to have the answers. That would be cool. Well gotta go. I've got a lot to say, but my finger hurts, so, as I have said many times before, please, anyone out there write a letter. About anything to do with carving, what are your hopes and dreams. Which way do you see this art business heading? Is it "I've got mine, so stay away" or is it so big that it's unfathomable. I think you know how I feel.....Oh, Heath and Chris hope you get a chance to come back for a competition.....A meeting in Ellensburg. ....Good luck Bill Plant, your contest draws near, remember you are doing them the favor.....Gotta go, Steve Backus

## OPPORTUNITIES

### Creede Wood Carvers Rendezvous, Creede Colorado

4th annual wood carvers rendezvous, July 8th-14th. Looking for a chain saw carver. Kent Bailey, their normal carver will be only able to carve for two days, July 8 & 9. Looking for a carver to fill the rest of the days. They do not pay anyone for carving. Looking for someone to bring western red cedar and maybe some milled cedar for the hand carvers. This might help pay for the trip.

A little about Creede; Creede is a historical Silver mining town nestled in the Rio Grande River Valley along the base of the majestic Rocky Mountains. This valley is 50 miles wide and 125 miles long and known to be the largest Alpine Valley in the world. Creede's altitude is 8,850 feet and can offer you cool nights, lots of open country, clean air, good fishing, and down to earth home town folks. This gathering is to have fun and keep the art of wood carving alive. To sign up for this or for more information, please write or call Ivan & Fran Vanaken, PO Box 314, Palmer Lake, Colorado 80133, Phone 719/ 481-2886. After June 1, Ivan & Fran Vanaken, General Delivery, Creede, Colorado 81130, Phone 719/ 658-1029

**A Study of Faces for Woodcarvers and Sculptors** Terry Kramer will be teaching a seminar March 31, April 1 & 2 and April 7 thru 9th in Lynnwood, WA. Tuition is \$250 and covers tuition and materials for both weekends. The seminar topic is an "Introduction to Carving or Sculpting Human Faces". Students at any skill level will find this class valuable for improving their artistic skills. Terry works in all 3-D media and will be instructing in clay and wood. Students will do various exercises that will specifically assist them in the construction of a human face. Final project may be executed in either clay or wood or stone. To register, send \$50.00 deposit to Terry Kramer or call with your VISA or MC number. Upon registration you will be sent directions to the class plus a list of items to bring with you the first session.

Terry Kramer

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215/ 794-8268

*The Cutting Edge Carvers News*

Congratulations to:

Dan & Ellie Whited of Lakebay, WA, on having a healthy baby boy, Nathan Wayne Whited, 10 lbs.4oz, born December 20, 1994.

Gary Patterson of Wisconsin on his new marriage.

Rick Travers of Palm Bay, Florida would like to say "hi to all" Hi! Rick!

**3rd Annual**

**KXLE/CENTRAL WASHINGTON  
Chainsaw Carving Contest**

**March 25 & 26**

**Western Theme**  
*No Eagles*

**Contact:**  
*Dan Whited*  
206/ 884-9534



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*Boilov's*

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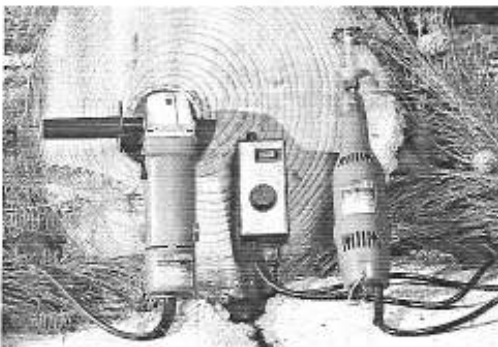
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The Makita (110 volt) electric saw has a chain speed of 5,500 feet per minute, which is fast, and the entire saw weighs just 9.5 pounds. The Poulan 180 is a 2.0 cubic inch chainsaw and the powerhead weighs just 8 pounds.



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# MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Cascade Chain Saw Sculptors' Guild was founded in 1986 with the purpose of promoting public and private awareness of chainsaw work as an art form, provide trade information and to invite a collaboration of energy among members. Annual membership dues are \$20.00 (U.S. Funds). Dues money pays for the bi-monthly newsletter The Cutting Edge, other mailings, and expenses of the CCSG.

Dues are collected in January for the current year. To join, please return this form, \$20.00, check or money order, payable to the Cascade Chainsaw Sculptors Guild

NEW MEMBER  RENEW

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone# \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

To help us get to know you please complete the following:

YEARS SCULPTING WITH SAW? \_\_\_\_\_

TYPE OF SCULPTURE USUALLY DONE? \_\_\_\_\_ LOG \_\_\_\_\_ USUAL LOG SIZE \_\_\_\_\_

MY BEST TYPES OF WORK ARE \_\_\_\_\_

YOU ARE: \_\_\_ FULL TIME CARVER \_\_\_ PART TIME CARVER \_\_\_ NOVICE \_\_\_ FAN of the ARTFORM

REMARKS/COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Please return to: The Cutting Edge, 7371 S. Holst Rd., Clinton, WA 98236

## GET YOUR T-SHIRT NOW!!!!

The Cascade Chainsaw Sculptors Guild has a few T-Shirts left.

The design is of an eagle's head with the words CASCADE CHAINSAW SCULPTORS GUILD underneath it. A real striking shirt.

Design by Don Etue

The cost is for guild members \$10.00 plus \$2.00 for shipping

**GET YOURS TODAY!!!!**

In Extra Large and Large the shirts are gray. In medium the only colors left are light blue.

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Size: \_\_\_\_\_ Color \_\_\_\_\_

Please pay \$12.00 check or money order to The Cascade Chainsaw Sculptors Guild and mail payment to 7371 S. Holst Rd., Clinton, WA 98236

*"I bought a guild shirt and my life improved immediately! My carvings got better and I felt happy about myself. I look so 'sharp' in my new shirt. My friends returned and made nice comments on my new wardrobe. Thank you for getting me this shirt."*

7371 S. Hoist Rd., Clinton, WA 98236

# Cutting Edge The

