

## **Rich Smoker**

Rich Smoker (b. 1952) grew up on the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania and developed an interest in waterfowl at an early age when he began carving hunting decoys with his father, R.B. Smoker. In his first year of hunting Rich took one of his birds to be mounted by a local taxidermist, and soon afterward Rich was offered a job in that shop. Later he would open his own taxidermy shop, and work as a specialized taxidermist for 18 years. The skills he learned in taxidermy helped to improve his carving skills, giving him acute knowledge of the anatomy of animals, and a chance to better understand the similarity between the sculptural aspects of both taxidermy and wildfowl carving. By and large, however, Rich continued to carve decoys at that time for use in hunting.

In 1982 Rich and his family moved to Marion Station, MD, near Crisfield, and he became invested in the legacy of Lem and Steve Ward. Rich began spending more time on carving and less on his taxidermy work—carving thousands of birds over the decades since moving to Maryland’s Eastern Shore.

Over the years, Rich has also become an active teacher of carving. He has twice served as a Master Carver in the Ward Museum’s Carving Out Future Decoy Makers program, and regularly teaches classes at the Ward World Championship along with his brother, Ross Smoker. In all, Rich has taught nearly 2,000 students in six states, and taken on 12 apprentices. Rich has even been a Master Carver in Maryland Traditions’ (Maryland State Arts Council) Master/Apprentice program (2006) and provides demonstrations and classes at the Maryland Traditions Folklife Festival each spring. For 22 years he has demonstrated carving to Road Scholar (formerly Elder Hostel) participants twice per year, and he hosts the “Wednesday Night Irregulars”—an informal class of a few students who meet at his home each week.

Rich is critically renowned for his work in competitions and has received many well-deserved accolades. In 2001 he was inducted to the Easton Waterfowl Festival’s Hall of Fame, and in 2011 he was honored by Maryland Traditions with the Achievement in Living Traditions and Arts award. This award is based in part on the recipient’s artistry, stewardship, and community impact. In 2004 Rich was invited to participate as a carver in the Smithsonian Institution’s Folklife Festival. In competition, Rich has won more than 500 ribbons, including over 100 Best in Show titles. In 2001 Rich won Third in World in the Decorative Miniature division at the Ward World Championship, and in 2008 he took the Best in World title in the Shootin’ Rig division.

Today Rich remains an active artist, sportsman, and teacher. He is also an active volunteer. Rich serves regularly as a competition judge at the Ward World Championship and the Chesapeake Wildfowl Expo. He has been the Carving Committee Secretary at the Easton Waterfowl Festival for 28 years (where he has been an exhibitor for 30 years), he is on the Crisfield Heritage Foundation Advisory Council, and has served in a variety of roles on the Chincoteague Decoy Carvers and Artists Association. Rich is also Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Ward Foundation, Ward Foundation Board Liaison for the Competition Committee, a member of the Board Nomination Committee, and Chair of the Ward Museum’s Curatorial Committee. He helped to create the Ward Museum’s Chesapeake Wildfowl Expo, with special attention to the

Chesapeake Challenge decoy carving competition. Through these positions Rich takes an active role in helping to maintain the integrity, and shape the future, of the Ward Museum and Foundation. He balances all of this with making time to enjoy life at his home on the Big Annemessic River in Marion Station, along with his wife Nancy, and regular visits from his daughter and son-in-law, and two grandchildren.

For his service to the Ward Museum and Foundation, his many accomplishments in the world of decoy carving, and commitment to teaching the craft and continuing the heritage of carving, the Ward Foundation is pleased to honor Rich Smoker as a 2016 Living Legend.