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### **The 2022 Ward World Championship and Future Competitions**

*The annual Ward World Championship will once again be virtually modified for 2022 as a result of continued uncertainty around COVID-19 and public health concerns at a local and international level. A new agreement has been formally made to continue to host the competition in Ocean City in the future.*

**Salisbury, MD, February 4, 2022** – The Ward Foundation, the non-profit that operates the Ward Museum of Wildfowl Art, Salisbury University, and hosts the historic Ward World Championship Wildfowl Carving Competition & Art Festival, has made the decision to hold a modified, three-day event — April 22-24, 2022 — in lieu of the regular in-person event at the Roland E. Powell Convention Center in Ocean City, MD. Virtual modification of the competition will heavily resemble the 2021 virtual event, with several exciting new components and competition categories, in addition to the return of live-streamed portions of judging.

Since 1971, the Ward World Championship has attracted hundreds of carvers and thousands of spectators from all over the world. Nearly 30% of the competition’s competitors are international, some traveling from as far away as Japan and Russia. In recent months, international carvers have expressed increasing concerns about their ability to attend an in-person event. It is the opinion of the Ward Foundation and its Board of Directors that a “World Championship” just wouldn’t be the same without competitors and guests from around the world.

“This decision was just as difficult, if not more difficult, of a decision to make as it was last year for us. We have been long-awaiting the opportunity to hold an appropriate celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> Ward World Championship; in-person and surrounded by the carvers, volunteers, and friends who have transformed this competition into an international triumph of art and tradition,” said Rich Smoker, Chairman of the Ward Foundation and World Champion decoy maker. “The Ward Foundation agreed that we would be unable to host the competition as planned, especially with the considerable speculation surrounding the participation of our international competitors. Once again, the board of directors unanimously agreed virtually modifying the event was the best, and safest, thing to do.”

### **Modifications for the 2022 Competition**

There will still be plenty for fans and competitors of the Ward World Championship to look forward to during the weekend of April 22-24. Over the course of three days, the Ward Foundation will host an exciting line-up of carving classes, workshops, demonstrations, and critiques with world-renowned and award-winning artists. Classes will be announced as they are confirmed, but participants can expect a wide range of subjects to choose from.

The virtually modified Ward World Championship will also still have competitive components. Carvers from all over will be able to mail in carvings to compete in more than 20 unique categories that will be



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judged live, in-person at the Ward Museum. Categories will be available to youth and novice carvers through masters; there will truly be something for every carver.

The Ward World Championship has long hosted the Benefit Art Auction, an auction of wildfowl art for amateur and veteran collectors alike. This auction, which supports the Ward Foundation—including efforts toward an in-person show in 2023—is being moved to an online platform that will enable collectors and enthusiasts to bid on a variety of pieces from the comfort of their own home. There will be two unique online auctions held: one with regular wildfowl art and decoys, as is traditional; and one featuring the winners of the champagne divisions and a rare opportunity to own a piece of Worlds history.

In addition, there will also be a small gathering of Living Legend Award recipients at the museum during the weekend of the competition. An open invitation stands to all classes of Living Legends from the previous nine years. A special honor will be made to the current group of award recipients: Jeff Bounds (Salisbury, MD), Jeff Rechin (Amissville, VA), and Ross Smoker (Selinsgrove, PA). More details about the Living Legend celebration will be announced as it is confirmed.

#### **A Commitment to the Future of the Competition for Years to Come**

It has unquestionably been a difficult few years for the competition and its supporters, but the Ward Foundation is pleased to share that we are fully committed to the future of this historic competition. No matter the challenges, the Ward Foundation believes the show must go on. Just this week, an agreement with the Ocean City Convention Center has been reached, securing the future of the competition in Ocean City through at least 2025.

The new agreement with the convention center sees the amount of competition floor space for 2023 and beyond more than double. The newly constructed C-hall will provide a major addition to the competition space. There will be significantly more room for vendors, demonstrations, and competitors. The show will also see the return of the awards ceremony back to the main floor of the competition, with seating for spectators. Throughout the halls, improved spaces will allow for participants and spectators alike to view the show more comfortably.

“It’s really disappointing to know we will not gather in person again this year; and we can’t wait to see everyone when we return to the in-person format in 2023. But I’m also excited to bring this hybrid event to people again this year,” said Kristin Sullivan, Executive Director of the Ward Foundation. “Last year we were able to share Worlds with tens of thousands of people through our virtual offerings, many of which experienced Worlds for the first time. We’re looking forward to sharing all that makes this competition special with even more people this year.”

Additional announcements about guest speakers, programming, and auction items for the modified Ward World Championship will be made in the coming weeks. Although the event will be happening



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primarily in a virtual setting, the Ward Foundation believes this year's event will still capture the spirit and excitement of the historic competition.

**About the Ward Museum of Wildfowl Art, Salisbury University**

The Ward Museum creates spaces and opportunities for learning about artistic traditions, community heritage, and connections to the natural environment. We create inspirational, innovative, and accessible exhibits, educational programs, and public events that build on the legacy of pioneering decoy makers Lem and Steve Ward.