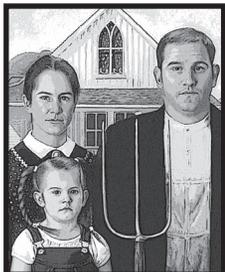


Whittling hobby leads to unconventional career



SAM DALKILIC-MIESTOWSKI

Art adventure

Bircan Degermenci is a native Turk, born in a small village about 120 kilometers from Ephesus.

His formal education was only through the sixth-grade. When he was not working with his family on the farm, he whittled small animals out of sticks.

Since the family lived in fairly close proximity to Ephesus, his father, on special occasions, took him to view the famous ancient ruins of one of Turkey's most well known tourist sites.

Ephesus was an affluent Aegean seaport in the sixth century B.C. It was subsequently conquered by Persia and then Rome. It was under Roman rule in 27 B.C. when the Roman emperor Augustus proclaimed Ephesus capital of the Asian province.

Ephesus became one of the largest cities in the Roman Empire; it was one of only three cities to have street lighting.

The grandeur of the ancient buildings, monuments, and fountains inspired Degermenci to embark on a very non-traditional career for a Turkish farmer's son.

He began making small wooden carvings in his early teens and selling them in the local bazaars. By the time he was in his mid-twenties, he had established himself in the region as an artist and sculptor.

The majority of his works are large-scale commissions. The uniqueness of his carvings is characterized by the uncompromising detail of the hand-carved work.



Even though he is self-taught ("naïve") he has a great understanding of composition and form. At his workshop he has no electricity or modern conveniences; all of his tools are handcrafted and made by him.

Each piece can take one year or more to complete. Each sculpture is carved from a single log of a tree.

Initially, he did all of his work from the olive tree, but for the past several years, it has been almost impossible to obtain a large olive log so he switched to oak.

For the past three years he has been unable to obtain any large logs and has scaled down his sculptures to fit the log size.

The eagle, or "king of birds," has been an icon of valor and might since ancient times. The eagle in combat with a snake dates back to Aztec times as well as Hindu mythology, where it is referred to as the bird Garuda.

The eagle's legendary heroic qualities have resulted in many rulers and countries adopting it for their insignia, including Germany, Poland, Bavaria and Austria.



Sculptures by Bircan Degermenci. Several of the Turkish sculptor's works are available for viewing in south Lake County, including at The Steeple Gallery in St. John. | PHOTOS PROVIDED

The eagle transcended to the 20th century, not only in countries, but also in one company that still uses the mystique of the eagle — Harley Davidson Motorcycles.

The eagle still represents freedom in the United States.

Degermenci's sculptures are in private collections in Turkey, Germany, Italy, England and America.

One of his pieces can be viewed at RBB Real Estate & Midtech Hydraulics at 7515 Lake Shore Drive, Cedar Lake.

To view a hand-carved sculpture in a corporate office, you may call Sandy at 374-9884 or view several pieces on display at The Steeple Gallery, Ltd. in St. John.

Winfield festival planned

A Winfield Township Communityfest is scheduled for Saturday, Sept. 1. Crafts, vendors and other activities.

The event is in the early planning stages, but plans are for it to include a parade, car show, arts and vendors and other participants should call Sherry Gasparovic at 662-1724 for more information.



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