

Ceremonial Masks & Ego Boosts!

Caloosa Carvers at The Mound House

By Gary Mooney

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The historic Mound House, the oldest standing structure on Estero Island owned and operated by the Town of Fort Myers Beach, prides itself as a museum complex and cultural and environmental learning experience that offers numerous monthly educational programs, including for kids. When you visit the Mound House, you experience history, archaeology, nature and environmental education, rare plants and beautiful gardens, outdoor adventures like kayaking, and woodcarving!

Woodcarving? You bet! The Caloosa Carvers of Fort Myers host free public carving demonstrations for all ages at the iconic Mound House on the first and third Tuesday of each month through tourism season from 9 a.m. to Noon. Their next Caloosa Carvers Mound House program is Tuesday, February 15, following by sessions on March 1 and 15, before concluding for the year on April 5 and 19. In addition to their free public demonstrations, these talented woodcarvers provide the Mound House with hands-on educational tools for school groups and the general public.

Here I Still Am

Caloosa Carver John Franz initiated the Mound House partnership even before the museum complex opened to the public in November 2015. "I received an email," John recalled, "wanting to know if we could present programs to create Calusa Indian replica exhibits. I met with the Mound House staff and several volunteers, and it looked like a good project, so I went back to our club to gauge interest, and Marge and Henry Robinson felt it was outstanding and jumped right in!" Henry adds that "the Mound House needed replica Calusa Indian ceremonial masks and I found that intriguing."

Carvers Chuck Cusson, Nick LoPresti, Marge and Henry Robinson, Larry and Mary Ellen Roslund, and Dick Turner demonstrated their woodcarving skills on a recent sunny but crisp Tuesday on the Mound House patio overlooking the scenic Estero Bay.

Each came to the Caloosa Carvers in their own way. Nick, a retired firefighter, police officer, and paramedic from Chicago, explains that "my wife Connie is an artist and one of her artist friends was a Caloosa Carver member. She told us about this carving group and that caught my interest, so I went to a meeting and twenty minutes later, I was buying carving tools!" Chuck was "looking for a carving club to join so I visited several in 2014 and the Caloosa Carvers were easily the best. I mostly carve small birds; the fine feather aspect of that is delicate and I try to recreate those as exactly as possible."

Larry says that "about five years ago I thought I might enjoy carving so I went to a meeting, and this seemed like a great activity for my retirement. My grandfather actually taught me to carve when I was around eight years old, as he was a woodworker. You not only make things that interest other people but after a bit, you surprise yourself with what you can do! I made a few masks from pieces of the famous Mound House

strangler fig tree that was partially lost in Hurricane Irma, and people bought them at Mound House auctions and that is quite a boost for my ego!”

Henry read about the Caloosa Carvers in the newspaper and went to a meeting with a friend. “That was back in 2005 and here I still am! At first, I could carve odds and ends but nothing special, and over 15 years later, I am now pretty good!” Henry’s wife Marge soon followed. “When he joined, we thought it would be great if wives came along, so that is what we did!” Like Henry, Dick learned about the Caloosa Carvers from the newspaper. “I went to my first meeting and loved it! I like to work with my hands and woodcarving is perfect for that, as it brings me a lot of satisfaction. I actually started to carve when I was a Boy Scout in the 8th grade and stuck with it over the years, eventually working my way up to carving several boats.”

Comradery!

While woodcarving obviously drew each to the Caloosa Carvers, Larry sums up the club allure with one word: “Comradery!” Marge agrees, saying “the greatest thing about the Caloosa Carvers is everyone is so nice and welcoming. They help you so much, whether you are a novice or have experience, and the next thing you know, you are a successful carver.” Henry concurs, adding that “while carving is fun, the best part are the friendships; we have such a great bunch.” “Of course I enjoy carving,” says Nick, “but it is the group comradery I enjoy most.” Dick “loves the people in the club, as well as creating something beautiful with my hands,” while Chuck believes that “the Caloosa Carvers are friendly and extremely talented artists! There is a tremendous amount of experience here and everyone supports you as wonderful mentors.”

The Caloosa Carvers, who formed in the 1980s, meet year-round at the Cypress Lake Presbyterian Church at 8260 Cypress Lake Drive in Fort Myers every Wednesday from 8:30 a.m. to Noon. For more information including on how to become a member, call 239-368-0151, see www.caloosacarvers.com or email at info@caloosacarvers.com.

One of our region’s most-beloved historic attractions, the Mound House traces its roots to the ancient Calusa of over 2,000 years ago. It is open Tuesdays through Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., enforces Social Distancing guidelines and requests that all unvaccinated visitors wear masks. The Mound House is at 451 Connecticut Street with overflow parking at 216 Connecticut. Admission is \$10 for ages 13 & up, \$8 for students with IDs, \$5 ages 6 to 12, and 5 & under free, with Fort Myers Beach residents receiving a 50% museum admission discount. For information, reservations, and a monthly programs schedule, call 239-765-0865 or see www.moundhouse.org.

A Truly Special Place!

Each Caloosa Carver has their own reason for volunteering at the Mound House. For Henry, “it is all about the view; how could you ask for anything better than this! The folks here are so nice and the visitors take such an interest in our work.” Nick adds that Mound House visitors are a potential source of new members, relating that “around a half-dozen joined from here over the past few years.” Chuck enjoys “carving outdoors in a wonderful setting, as well as learning about our local and Calusa history.” Dick states

that “I revel in the nature here, and it is not only the visitors who treats us great but the staff and other volunteers do as well.”

When Marge considers the Caloosa Carvers / Mound House partnership, she lets out a long “AHHHH! You could not ask for a more beautiful setting to chip away at your wood pieces to create something magnificent. You meet so many interesting people from all over the nation and world, with such marvelous backgrounds. We love the Mound House folks who are so cooperative and friendly. Remember, we are not just Caloosa Carver members but official Mound House volunteers as well, so I encourage everyone to visit the Mound House and you too will discover that this is a truly special place!”