



PHOTO BY MAXFIELD MORRIS

From left to right, Alison Cook, Debora Remington, Joe You and Shirley Koffelt spend time in Koffelt's shop.

## Carving a niche

Over the years, the **Capital Woodcarvers Association** has grown, split, branched off and budded. The club has existed in one form or another since the mid-1970s, and its members are still passionately whittling away chunks of wood and bark. With around 70 active members, the club welcomes anyone interested in learning to release the sculptures hidden in blocks of wood. They offer carving instruction alongside years of experience. SN&R chatted with some club members in advance of their annual woodcarving show: **Joe You**, president of the club and member of the Caricature Carvers of America; **Alison Cook**, club secretary and cottonwood bark carver; **Debora Remington**, club member; and **Shirley Koffelt**, longtime club member and former cabinet maker.

### Is it hard to keep a club going for 40 plus years?

**You:** It has its challenges, especially in this climate in California. You know, sitting down to carve wood for three or four hours, a lot of people don't have that kind of time. So the people who are interested tend to have a lot more time on their hands.

### How helpful is it having someone walk you through woodcarving, compared to learning in your spare time?

**Koffelt:** Trying to do it on your own just takes forever. But you work with someone who has experience, they know the things you should not do.

### How do you find what your next project is going to be?

**Cook:** I'm a bark carver, period. So for me, the next project is whatever that piece of bark tells me it's going to be. So my biggest challenge is picking the next piece of bark. ... Another thing I

like about bark is, I think more than other kinds of wood, it actually helps direct what you do ... I had one piece of bark and I kept running into these little metal pieces and I finally showed one of our carvers ... They said, "Oh, that's buckshot." ... So my piece of bark was probably on a tree and a target was put on the tree and they shot the target.

### How did y'all get into woodcarving?

**Koffelt:** Well, I lived on the beach up in Washington state, up in San Juan Islands, and I used to find wood washed up on the beach. And I had my dad's old, dull pocketknife, and did not have any success, but I really tried. And tugboats used to come in there and get loads, barges full of lime rock. One of the men off the tugboat befriended me and we'd sit on the beach and we would carve, and he made little spoons and little shovels, and they were so perfect and so beautiful that I wanted to do that. But I never could.

And then I started taking classes here at the club, and I found out how to sharpen and what good tools to get, and then I could do something. It was all those years, from when I was 10 years old up until when I was in my 40s probably, before I really found someone to show me what to do.

### Are there any commonalities between woodcarvers?

**Remington:** There's a lot of comedy in wood carving, a lot of funny people.

**Koffelt:** They like to eat. Cookies and coffee.

**Cook:** I think the one characteristic is that they're fascinated by wood, in some way. Whether they like different types of wood or that they've appreciated wood bannisters or wood mantles or something, but there's something about wood that attracts them. □

Don't miss the Capital Woodcarvers Association's annual wood & gourd show at the Scottish Rite Masonic Center on May 18 and 19. Tickets are \$5. For more information on the club, visit [capitalwoodcarvers.org](http://capitalwoodcarvers.org).

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