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The art of pumpkin carving



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The Art of Pumpkin Carving

Sharpen your knives, fire up your drills. It's carving time!

Clear off the kitchen table. Sharpen your knives. Fire up your drills. And keep small children away. It's pumpkin carving time. And we mean serious business.

Contemporary pumpkin carving has developed into an artform all its own. Anyone who's a fan of the Food Network's *Outrageous Pumpkin Challenges* will tell you that carving has really gone wild. From the addition of props and enhancements such as animatronic hands and oozing eyeballs, to waterfalls and pumpkin towers, it seems there is no limit to the creativity we're seeing in the realm of pumpkin carving. So if you want to go extreme — and really, who doesn't? — then this is the perfect time of year to unlock your inner Edward Scissorhands and your imagination, and go for it.

With the pumpkin carving contest at the Bonfire at the Iron Furnaces in Scranton right around the corner (the event will be held Oct. 20), and Halloween just less than a month away, we thought it would be the perfect time to talk about the art of carving. Whether you're a beginner interested in creating a classic Jack-o-lantern with a spooky face or a more experienced carver capable of designing a bas-relief sculpture from a pumpkin, now's the time to select your pumpkin, grab a few tools and get carving.

We recently caught up some local pumpkin carvers whose work you may have admired at last year's carving contest at the Bonfire — Clarks Summit sculptor Eugene Moyer, as well as Darryl and Johnine Keating Bikauskas. All are looking forward to diving into their pumpkin carving projects again this year, and we think you'll find their enthusiasm to be contagious.

Moyer, a retired accountant, took up sculpting in 2002, as a way to find a creative outlet and pass the time. An experienced woodcarver, Moyer describes himself primarily as a wildlife sculptor. He's currently working on an exhibit on dinosaurs, which is expected to be completed in two years. While this keeps him quite busy, he won't miss the opportunity to carve pumpkins for Halloween.



Last year, he was commissioned to carve large circus pumpkins, each more than 100 pounds, with the Barnum & Bailey Ringling Bros. Circus logo and circus animals. The second pumpkin also included circus animals. (Interesting note: he found the pumpkins locally!).

We can't divulge too much about what he has planned for this year's carving contest at the Iron Furnaces, but we can say it will be a work that combines his love of wood sculpture and pumpkin carving — a combination piece, if you will. Hmmm, sounds interesting. We wondered what kind of tools are in Moyer's tool box for such an endeavor. "When I first started carving pumpkins, I used kitchen knives. Now I use X-Acto knives. They're very sharp and they're very versatile tools. You can do more with an X-Acto because it has a smaller blade and you can put fine detail into the surface of the pumpkin."

Moyer creates bas-relief (pronounced *bas relief*) pumpkins. "That's when you do a three dimensional carving in two dimensions. For example, if you've ever seen an old nickel



where you see the image of a buffalo on the nickel — that's bas-relief. You're taking two dimensions and giving the illusion of three dimensions. I'll often do that in my pumpkins. Instead of making a simple cutout face, I'll do an actual bas-relief on the surface of the pumpkin," he said. He always tries to look for something unique and original, and design his own patterns. A helpful tip from the artist: look on the internet for ideas and then step away from the computer and start drawing on your pumpkin using your own imagination. "Typically, I do a sketch in magic marker on

Let's carve!

Here are a few great tips on pumpkin carving from www.extremepumpkins.com. Check out the site for more tips and patterns for your extreme carving adventure:

■ **Decapitation or Back Surgery?:** You don't have to take off the top, you can also take off the bottom or the back. Cut off the bottom if you want the top to look untouched and cut off the back if you want to use the entire front, top, and bottom for a design. Regardless, you do want to get in there and remove the seeds. If you don't, the squirrels will.

■ **Cutting the Plug:** Decapitating is the toughest thing to do, the top of the pumpkin is woody and tough. You need a strong blade. Use a drywall saw for this. If you don't have one, use a filet knife and be cautious. Cut the plug to be a cone-shape with a little jog in it, so that it comes out easily and fits back easily too. (Check out the instructional video on www.extremepumpkins.com).

■ **Scoop the goop:** Use an ice cream scoop. Scrape around the sides, starting from the hole opening to the bottom. Then, after all of the walls are scraped, dump the pumpkin goop into the trash.

■ **Draw the face:** Dry erase markers work well because if you don't like your work, you can erase it! Also, after you are done your pumpkin won't end up with an accidental layer of guy-liner that screams "sloppy".

■ **Use power tools:** A jigsaw works well to remove chunks (like eyes and the mouth) and then use a rotary tool to carve away the skin. For big areas, break out an angle grinder. It removes the pumpkin skin and can even be used to shape the pumpkin.

■ **Great Props Are Everywhere:** How about Twizzlers for dreadlocks? Wood chips for teeth, taffy for tongues, home insulation for brains? Good props can be found at the grocery store and beyond.

■ **Preserving Your Pumpkin:** Spray it with bathroom cleaner with bleach. This keeps the bugs, mold, and animals away.

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the pumpkin. It doesn't have to be refined, just a rough sketch of what I intend to do. That works whether I'm doing a cutout or a bas-relief sculpture."

Last year, he started using a drill. "Sometimes, when you're carving a pumpkin cutout with a knife, you can tear the wall of the pumpkin. You have to be real careful. To prevent tearing, you can puncture pumpkins using drills."

From bas-relief sculptures to capturing the essence of a beautiful face in pumpkin glory, there are plenty of modern-day Jack-o-lantern options. Just ask the Bickauskas Family – Johnine Keating Bickauskas, and her husband, Darryl, and their daughter, Kayla. You may have seen Johnine's entries in the Bonfire Carving Contest last year with a silhouette of Kayla's face on one pumpkin, and another entry featuring a pumpkin breaking out of its outer pumpkin jail cell. The jailbreak pump-

kin won the People's Choice Award, and the entire family is gearing up for another great time at the festival this year.

If you're intimidated of trying something new, the Bickauskas family suggested buying pumpkin carving kits with all the tools you need to get started. "Don't be afraid of making a mistake," Darryl said. "Just try it."

If you'd like to enter the pumpkin carving contest at the Bonfire at the Iron Furnaces, the deadline for registration is Oct. 18. Jack-o-lantern art must be original (no stencils) and carved ahead of time. Entries will be dropped off on the night of the event. For more information, email artslackawanna@gmail.com and put "Jack-o-lantern carving" in the subject line.

— julie imel

Perfect Pumpkins

Alternatives to carving. No power tools required.

Here's a few pumpkin decorating ideas from Francene Dudzic at Monogram Muse (www.monogrammusegifts.com).

To create pumpkins with glitter, use craft or real pumpkins. You'll need ribbon, glitter, craft glue and paintbrushes.

To create the monogram pumpkin (at right), you'll need black craft or real pumpkins (painted), ribbon, custom cut vinyl lettering and dots. (Alternatives: adhesive scrapbook letters and patterns).

You can make plaid pumpkins using craft or real pumpkins, ribbon and paint. For the bat pumpkin, you'll need a small craft or real pumpkin, black paint, brush, glue and craft foam in white and black.

The benefit of using craft pumpkins is that you can store and reuse your pumpkin each year.



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