

Our Virtual Show Origin Story

It was March of 2021 and club members were lamenting that we could not have our Annual Show that normally happens in late March. Almost three years earlier our website went down due to closure of the hosting configuration. After rebuilding the website from the scraps, it was just about ready to go on-line. And then someone pointed out that a few other groups had virtual shows – maybe we could too!

The board thought they should check with the membership to gauge the interest level. So I was asked to bring it up at the club's next Zoom meeting. Reactions were mixed; some people really wanted the interaction with the visitors and felt virtual was not enough while others wanted to go for it even with limitations.

And then I realized I was stuck. Once you speak up, everyone assumes that you are the leader and wait for you to lead.

I had asked if there were a few members who were willing to be on a team to create a Virtual Show. We had a meeting bringing up a number of good ideas as well as laying out the basic structure and guidelines. There was a second meeting to pin down some details. The team members were (in alphabetical order) Andre Lapeyre, Bob Nowicki, Bruce Borgschatz, Mark Fredrickson, Mike Snyder and Nick Poleschuk. A few of them also offered assistance to any members who wanted help taking and delivering photos for the show. I only know of Bruce and myself being called on for this. Bruce also successfully worked to publicize the show with a number of local media outlets.

Andre and I were two of the three people who had worked to reestablish our website. Andre put together a basic web page to display a member's set of photos. This became the first member's Virtual Table. Andre also helped by creating e-mail addresses and ironing out website wrinkles.

While waiting for club member's submissions, I started building the features for the show – first in my mind and then on the web. And then, dreaming up how to make it easy and pleasant for our visitors. Trying to make it feel like walking through a show by having the Tables connect from one to the next, avoiding the need to return to the main page each time. Since you're walking around, why not have a bench to stop at. Maybe some animation while you sit and rest your fingers. Perhaps a second Easter Egg that is harder to find? And was the Virtual Team a real team or were they just virtual? Features and extras just kept coming to mind.

Some of the tables came together quickly, others needed extra work. This often involved requests to provide captions, an introduction and/or a selfie. Other work was adjusting the photos themselves. This might just be some cropping to better fit in a landscape slide show or suppressing distracting backgrounds. A number of photos benefitted from digitally adjusting the lighting to bring out the details of the carving. (A couple of before and after examples are included below.)

The show became my full time job – 7 days a week. For the first week it was about 8 hour days. Then it ramped up to 10 hours. The final nine or ten days were around 12 hours each.

So after roughly 250 hours, forty-some web pages, more than 100 hand tweaked links between pages and rigorous double checking, a Virtual Show appeared.

So if there are any problems or complaints, I am here to take the blame.

If you enjoyed the show, thank all the people that worked to make it happen – not just the Virtual Team but also all of the members who made the wonderful projects that we displayed.



