

Unveiling Santa one chip at a time

By Tommy Mann Jr.

Randall Roberts already has a large number of Santa Claus figures and pins carved and in various stages of completion, but knows more are needed to meet his usual holiday demand.



Randall Roberts carefully forms a new Christmas creation from a block of wood.



WOODCARVING IS AN ANCIENT and beautiful art few can ever master. That makes Randall Roberts of Bridge City a true artist. Roberts, 46, has been a “serious” wood carver for more than 20 years and considers it his passion.

“I started carving wood seriously when I was in my mid-20s,” Roberts said. “I was always fascinated by wood carving when I was younger, especially by Andy Anderson. I remember seeing some of his work on display at the LBJ Library in Austin many years ago, and that is when I really decided I wanted to do more than just carve sticks.”

Since then Roberts has honed his craft and even found jobs as a full-time wood carver with cabinetry shops before deciding to try his luck in the open market.

“I dabbled in realistic stuff like ducks, quail and other animals for a while, but it really became fun when I started working with characters,” Roberts said. “The freedom to experiment and be a little silly with my work really appealed to me.” Roberts said he likes to work with figures placed in funny situations, such as a fisherman with a hook and line stuck in his hat or a hunter in a similar mishap. However, as popular as his specialty figures are, Roberts always enjoys the Christmas season and carving a new batch of Santa Claus figures for the upcoming holiday season.

“THE HOLIDAY FIGURES are very popular with people,” Roberts said. “In the past, most of my Santa figures would be tall and skinny with the long robes, but I am making some of the more traditional looking Santa Claus figures this year. Also,

I am making several Santa pins for people to wear on their shirts or coats.” Depending on the size of the figure he is carving, Roberts said one wood carving typically takes 15 to 25 hours of work from beginning to completion.

“I rarely do one figure from start to finish,” Roberts said. “Generally I will carve one, and then move it to the side until I have a batch ready to paint. Then I paint a group while I work on something else, and then come back and add more color while I continue working on other projects.” Roberts said he usually sells the figures as fast as he carves them and regularly has people call to place a custom order or even ask to drop by his house and view his current batch of finished products.