



Randy McGovern paints at The Craftsmen's Classic show held at the Richmond Raceway. Photo by Peggy Stansbery

The Craftsmen's Classic returns for its 43rd year

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The Richmond Raceway Complex transformed into a bustling market featuring the work of artists and craftspeople from across the nation this past weekend for the annual Craftsmen's Classic.

The organization holds seven festivals a year, two of which are in Richmond, according to the festival's website.

The Craftsmen's Classic began 49 years ago in Greensboro, North Carolina, according to Carly Gilmore Cook, the advertising and marketing director for Gilmore Shows. She said the show first came to Richmond 43 years ago.

The idea for The Craftsmen's Classic emerged when her father began creating and selling jewelry at farmers markets and small events at 10 years old, according to Cook.

After watching his son sell his jewelry at a variety of events, her grandfather wanted to create his own show, Cook said.

The company began small and now is one of the highest nationally ranked production companies for events, according to Cook. The festival first came to Richmond because they saw an opportunity in its market, Cook said.

"There are a lot of good customers and exhibitors here," Cook said. "We wanted to explore that market."

The Craftsmen's Classic's company Gilmore Shows organizes the production of the event, according to Cook. Gilmore Shows handles contracting with the exhibitors chosen for the festival. The exhibitors are accepted through a jury and committee, she said.

"First they apply to our shows. They send in photos and information about their work and what they do," Cook said. "Then it goes to a jury and committee who takes a look and looks at the level of talent and their setup and if it would add a good piece to the show."

There are between 250 to 300 artists at Richmond's Craftsmen's Classic, according to Cook. She said Gilmore Shows additionally works with organizing the



Judy Wobbleton poses with her basketry at The Craftsmen's Classic Show. Photo by Peggy Stansbery

facilities. They rent out the facility and work out logistics such as how many benches are needed and how to set up the box office.

"Then we get into the facility the week of the show and we start setting up on Tuesday," Cook said. "When we walk into a building it's completely empty."

Gilmore Shows also organizes The Craftsmen's Classic's marketing through helping buy and create TV and radio advertisements, according to Cook.

Cook said she hopes in the future they can continue keeping business strong and producing a good, high standard show. She said she feels grateful they survived the pandemic.

"COVID did a number on the event industry in general, and a lot of other production companies went out of business," Cook said. "Right now we are just thankful we made it through COVID and hope it continues to stay strong."

Cook said she hopes people appreciated the hard work and talent of all the exhibitors at the festival.

"Because these people work harder than anyone I've ever seen," Cook said. "Many of these people are traveling 40 weeks a year doing this all over the country and that's a lot of hard work."

Artist Judy Wobbleton is the co-founder of the North Carolina Basketmakers

Association. She has been selling her work at Richmond's Craftsmen's Classic for many years.

Wobbleton said she has created and sold fiber art basketry for over 35 years. She created her business after taking a class in basketry offered on base during her time as a military wife.

“

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Randy McGovern, wildlife artist

Wobbleton teaches her craft in her business and her work has been published, she said. Wobbleton said she hoped visitors of The Craftsmen's Classic learned about basketry as they shopped.

"There is a lot of history to basketry. We had this before we had paper or plastic bags," Wobbleton said. "They were used on the farms and they are influenced by the

Native Americans as well as the Appalachian mountain people."

Wobbleton said she found the process of preparing for this year's show to be "quite easy."

"It's like coming home. When you've been here for so many years it's sort of a routine," Wobbleton said.

Wobbleton said she enjoyed how receptive the attendees were, along with how they appreciated the work of the exhibitors at the show. Visitors at The Craftsmen's Classic had the opportunity to meet the exhibitors and watch their creative process as they shop, according to the festival's website.

Wildlife artist Randy McGovern painted live while selling his artwork at this booth. McGovern said he describes himself as a "romantic realist."

"By that I mean, you want to paint a real deer but you want to give it a noble pose and a pretty setting with beautiful colors," McGovern said. "You want to romanticize it so it's a pretty picture."

McGovern found himself gravitating towards wildlife art because of his upbringing, he said.

"My hobby when I was in eighth grade was hunting snakes in the swamps of Louisiana. I was used to the outdoors, I did bass fishing as well," McGovern said. "So I gravitated towards wildlife. Wildlife is just a natural thing."

McGovern has been a professional artist for almost 40 years and has participated in The Craftsmen's Classic for about 30 years, he said.

McGovern said that over the years people have begun to know him as "the guy who hides the little things" in his paintings. In each painting McGovern includes small details, such as a hidden chipmunk, that can't be seen at initial glance, according to McGovern.

The show takes a lot of work to put together, McGovern said. He said it involved a lot of unloading, lifting and moving heavy objects.

"Everything is a mess and then you have to take a mess and make an organized thing of beauty," McGovern said.