

An Artisan OF STONE

By Rick Runningbear



Mike Stone Carver Utz, Of The Bear Spirit Band

Mike Utz, of Strawberry Plains, Tennessee, has led an interesting life. He was born in Stone Mountain, GA, but also hails from Ohio, the land where many ancient Indian mounds are located. In his youth Mike used to love to go exploring and looking for Indian artifacts and developed a sharp eye for locating spear points and stone articles that had been worked by human hands in bygone eras.

Mike, is known by band and tribal members simply as "Stone Carvr" as he is known to be skilled in carving beautiful Native style items out of various kinds of stone. His grandmother was Cherokee and had long black hair which is shown in an old photograph of her that Stone Carvr is proud to show people who are interested in his Native ancestry.

Before his "semi-retirement" Mike was a builder of ornamental stone fountains and waterfalls which he built for a number of residents and commercial sites in this area. As a landscape architect, his goal was to achieve "balance" with his works to match with the personality of the client and fit the ambiance of the site. This is part of his Cherokee "all things should be in balance" philosophy of life.

Although he has a life time of involvement in Native culture, it was not until a few years ago when he met Starr Thunderfoot McCauley, chief of the Buffalo Creek Band of SeCCI, that he decided to join the Southeastern Cherokee Council. At the formation of the new Bear Spirit Band of northeastern Tennessee, he was voted in as the Chief of that band. He has been active in building things at the Bear Spirit Band, including the Council Yurt, and the ceremonial water fountain.

Mike Stone Carvr has a natural curiosity and loves to explore new locations out in Nature. He is very knowledgeable about

mushrooms and often goes out in the woods and collects various forms of edible mushrooms. He also knows how to prepare tasty dishes from them as well.

He loves to go out on the rivers and lakes of East Tennessee in his canoe with his digital camera and photograph wildlife. He has many excellent photos of Bald Eagles that he spotted near the water. He has even taken photos of wild coyotes. One of his hobbies is fishing, which is very adept at. He is also interested in trains and photographing them.

Stone Carvr always keeps a good supply of different kinds of stones and rocks which he uses in his stone carving activities. He tests them for hardness and workability. One of his specialties is the making of ornamental medicine wheel pendants. The one he is wearing on the photo in this page he made out of Alabaster stone. He has made several and gifted them to various persons. Some are made out of different colors of Soap Stone. Mike uses both hand tools and power tools in the making of stone art work

Stone Carvr says, "I like working with stone because it is so old yet durable. The items I make, I know will last a long time and they seem to carry a "spirit" in them that promotes good medicine in people".



Above: Cherokee Water Spider, etched into stone by Mike Stone Carvr Utz, of the ceremonial water fountain at Bear Spirit Grounds, Tennessee.

