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Pipe Pride

Governor signs law making Adena Effigy Pipe Ohio's Official Artifact

STEVEN P. KELLER

Managing Editor

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Recent action by the Ohio State Legislature has brought to light a little known, but long standing, Wellston organization which has a direct connection.

On May 24, 2013 Governor John Kasich signed legislation making the Adena Effigy Pipe the Official State Artifact. Earlier in the year, the house and senate unanimously agreed to make the pipe the state artifact, but it became law with the signing of Senate Bill 33.

The original pipe was discovered in 1901 in a mound on the Chillicothe estate of Thomas Worthington which he named Adena. Worthington was Ohio's sixth governor and one of Ohio's first two U.S. senators.

The effigy pipe, credited to the Adena culture and dated to 800 BC to 100 AD, is one of the most well-known items on exhibit at the Ohio History Center in Columbus. After working four years to get the pipe recognized as the state's artifact by 4th grade students from the Columbus School for Girls, as well as staff from the school and the Ohio Historical Society (OHS), their work successfully culminated with the signing of the bill.

With the pipe's popularity, reproductions of it are one of the best sellers in the OHS store.

The reproductions are now, and always have been, made in Wellston at J-Vac Industries and that is the only place they are made.

"Back when Marjorie Sellers was here, a contest was held to see who could make the best reproduction of the pipe and J-Vac won," said Nick Elliott, Superintendent of the Jackson County Board of Developmental Disabilities which oversees Hope Haven School and J-Vac.

"As far as we can tell from old newspaper articles, we have been making the pipes since 1977 and I understand they are flying off the shelves at the Ohio Historical Society since the governor signed the bill."

David Price, Director of Adult Services at J-Vac, told The Telegram he believes making the pipe the state artifact will increase sales which means more money going to the clients who actually create them. Since the price of materials has increased, he recently negotiated with OHS to get a better price for the pipes which also means more money for clients.

"This is a big deal for us," said Price.

The pipe is affectionately known as Adena Man by those who create the reproductions at J-Vac.

Charles Andrews, of Jackson, has been a J-Vac client since 1969 and has been creating the pipes since the very beginning. He is now the worker who pours a special ceramic slurry into specially made molds and after a time removes them and passes them on to the next work station.

"It's like an assembly line," said Price. "There are mold lines that have to be removed and then there is detail work and painting."

Andrews told The Telegram he makes an average of four castings each day and works five days a week.

From Andrews the newly created pipes are sanded and some detail work is done by Helen Toland and Marie Bragg, both J-Vac clients for 22 years. New to the Adena Man project is Darrell Perkins who is learning the various sanding techniques.

In charge of ceramic projects is Debbie Lusk who has been working with clients who do ceramics the past two years. She oversees production and does some carving when needed.



Photo By Steven P. Keller

Charles Andrews has been at J-Vac Industries since 1969 and has been working with the manufacture of Adena Effigy Pipes since the beginning of the program. In his right hand is a pipe that has just been taken out of a mold and in his left, the finished product which is virtually the same as the original even down to the markings of the soapstone from which the original was made.

"When I named her as director of ceramics the first thing she did was clean-up the molds so they were as good as new," Price said. "We looked at pictures of the original pipe and worked from there," Lusk added. "There was a lot of carving."

Price said OHS is hesitant to make new molds from the original pipe which is made of Ohio soapstone, a relatively soft and easily scarred material. As he examined a mold, Price said, "After Debbie cleaned them, they are almost identical to the original."

"When the economy got into trouble in 2008 our orders dropped, but I will be delivering an order soon. Our spring order is usually the biggest and we will take 100 to 200 pipes," Price said. When he delivers pipes, he usually picks up another load of slurry so manufacturing can continue. "The slurry is like really thick milk, or yogurt," said Price.

The Adena Effigy Pipe is not the only item made at J-Vac for OHS. Also manufactured are pipes featuring the raven, the otter, the dog, and more, as many as 25-30 items. The Hopewell Pot is also one of the biggest sellers.

Lusk said, "Sanding and carving create dust. We recycle that because materials are so expensive and we make other ceramic items from the dust."

Those other ceramic items will be seen in Jackson later this summer when the program's ART in the heART opens a store in Jackson, in the building which was once home to Jackson County Economic Development and the county GIS operation on the corner of Broadway and Pearl Streets.

Price said J-Vac has a number of other contracts which employ many workers. There is a contract with Merillat for woodworking, there is a paper shredding operation, and there are contracts for mowing, plus more. "We have a lot going on here," Price said.

"I think this is great," said Superintendent Elliott. "Making the pipes is something we have done all those years and they can now be found all over the country."

J-Vac cannot sell the pipes or even give one away. The only place they can be purchased is at the Ohio History Center and the only place they are made is in Wellston at 202 South Pennsylvania Avenue.

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