



Joaquin Juatai

Level Up 2026!



Wood Turners Worldwide

worldwidewoodturners.org
The Art of Makin' Shavings

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By Dane Chandler, President
Photos by Brent Sobotka unless otherwise labeled

Level-Up 2026 is in the books, and what an incredible experience it was.

A Vision Becomes Reality

attendees would get behind the lathe, work alongside experienced turners, ask questions, and learn by doing.

Scott and I began plotting and planning how we could make it happen. The idea evolved over the years, and with the support of the Worldwide Woodturners community, that vision finally became reality in Wisconsin Rapids.

The success of Level-Up belongs to the people who made it happen.

First, our coaches. Every one of them came to Level-Up 2026 on their own dime, provided the materials needed for their classes - and often materials for other classes as well - and worked side-by-side with attendees. Collectively, they passed along centuries of woodturning knowledge and experience. That willingness to freely share

The idea began about five years ago when Scott Tague came to me with a vision: create something different from the traditional woodturning event. Instead of sitting and watching,



Al Dawson films Doug Miller turning a bowl during our Wednesday night meeting Sept. 16.



Matt Harber with Tom Wing at the lathe.

what they know is exactly what Level-Up was created to foster.

A special recognition goes to Billy Burt Sr., who chaired the Level-Up Planning Committee, and to every member of that committee.

Behind the scenes, Wanda Hoggard, Julie

Tague, Madeline Brown, Julie Hatch, Norman Burt, and Lisa Gargiulo kept everyone fed and handled serving, cleanup, and the countless details that kept things moving.

Then there was the Broom Crew - Doug Medori, Walt Ruben, and Julie Hatch - who took it upon themselves to stay ahead of the mountains of shavings around the lathes. Anyone who has spent a day turning knows that was no small assignment!

Dave Rhodes, our Master-Webmaster, handled the IT work that made registration possible - and somehow managed to put up with me and my

seemingly endless data dumps and requests for specialized reports. Much of his work wasn't visible, but it was essential to keeping Level-Up organized.

Brent Sobotka stepped up as our Level-Up photojournalist, documenting the people, projects, shavings, friendships, and memories. Thanks to Brent, we now have a lasting visual record of Level-Up 2026 for posterity.

A special thanks also goes to Dewey Johnson, who created the commemorative Level-Up 2026 plaques. They gave us something tangible to remember this first Level-Up and the people who helped make it possible.

Our Board members - Scott Tague, Joaquin Juatai, Patrick Hoggard, Billy Burt Sr., and Martin Clarkson - provided the commitment and support necessary to bring everything together.



Norman Calvin turning a goblet.



Norman Calvin, Scott Medori, and Dale Slaughter listen as Joaquin Juatai discusses spindle gouge techniques.



Stephen Feuerbach and a crowd watch as president Dane Chandler shares tool sharpening tips.

On a personal note, a special thank-you to Joaquin Juatai, who became my balancing center when I needed it most. Through all the moving parts, decisions, and pressures that came with Level-Up, you were there when I needed someone to help keep me centered. I appreciate you, brother.

A hands-on event like Level-Up simply doesn't happen without equipment. So many people loaded up and hauled lathes, grinding stations, tools, wood, equipment, and supplies across the country, then shared them freely so others could learn.

A special callout goes to Gary Hales and the North Alabama Woodturners, who stepped up in a huge way by providing us with so many of the lathes needed for Level-Up. Their willingness to help ensured that our attendees could spend less time waiting and more time where they belonged - at a lathe, making shavings and learning.

We were also fortunate to have Kirk and Linda Kapp of Kapp's Kreations as our special vendor. Their presence, support, and everything they did for us added another special element to the Level-Up experience.

Our industry supporters were equally generous. D-Way Tools donated 1/4-inch bar stock for our 3-Point Tool Making class along with gift certificates, and Carter & Son Tools donated a 1/2-inch handled skew and gift certificates.

Combat Abrasives provided us with a tremendous discount on a year's worth of

sandpaper for use at Level-Up. At the conclusion of the event, Worldwide Woodturners was then able to pass that generosity forward by donating the remaining sandpaper to our youngest member, Blaine Ruben, for use in his own shop.

Generosity seemed to inspire more generosity everywhere we looked.

Joe Gibson and Tim Hatch donated their lathes to two of our newest turners, Doug Medori and Ryan Putskey, giving them the opportunity to continue their woodturning journeys at home.

Karl Geary won the lathe raffle and immediately turned around and gifted his new lathe to Brenda Thornton.

The coaches who won the donated gift certificates did much the same, passing their winnings along to Blaine Ruben and Ryan Putskey.

Then there was the wood - truckloads of it. People hauled wood from across the country, not just for Level-Up classes but so fellow turners could load some up, take it home, and continue creating in their own shops. That kind of generosity says a great deal about this community.

We are also grateful to the Lions Club for the fabulous facilities that became our home for those three days.

Having the right space was critical to making a hands-on event of this size work, and we couldn't have asked for a better place to bring Level-Up to life.



Blaine Ruben and Roger Wollam in deep discussion at the lathe.



Jayson Cote shared the finished projects he learned at Level-Up. He turned a buffing wheel using the magic Morse Taper (coach Joaquin Juatai), an oak whiskey glass (coach Gary Hales), a two part vase (coach Tim Hatch), an end grain bowl (coach Billy Burt), and a scalloped cedar bowl (coach Patrick Hoggard). He also displayed his commemorative plaque made by Dewey Johnson. Image: Jayson Cote

Our appreciation also goes to the Hotel Mead for blocking rooms for our group and providing a special Level-Up rate. We apparently made an impression there, too - the manager told us the staff hadn't had that much fun with a group of people in years! That says something about the people who make up Worldwide Woodturners.



Billy Burt at the lathe. Photo by Dave Kingsley.

A heartfelt thank-you goes to everyone who donated turned art, participated, bid, and supported our auction to raise seed money for Level-Up 2028. The generosity was overwhelming and heartfelt. Before the shavings from 2026 have

even settled, this community has already helped plant the seeds for what comes next.

Most importantly, to everyone who attended Level-Up 2026: you came ready to learn, ask questions, try something new, make shavings, share a laugh, and spend three days alongside fellow turners. Without you, there simply is no Level-Up.

Five years after Scott first brought me the idea, I looked around that room and saw lathes turning, coaches and attendees working shoulder-to-shoulder, friendships being made, knowledge being freely shared, and people giving to one another without being asked. The vision had become reality.

Level-Up 2026 showed what can happen when a community comes together with one purpose: Worldwide Woodturners helping Worldwide Woodturners become better at the craft we all love.

To everyone who had a hand in making Level-Up 2026 happen, thank you. You didn't just make an event successful - you helped establish what Level-Up can become. The auction has



Above: Martin Clarkson looks on as Charlie Bundy (right) and Larry Brown (left) prepare the next steps in their project. The full house of turners sharing their knowledge, turning and learning in the background shows how amazing the weekend was. There was never a lathe idle, never a question left unanswered, and always a laugh to be shared. **Below:** Evening supper was more of the same: Camaraderie at every turn.

already provided the seed money. The lessons learned in 2026 will help us build something even stronger. And most importantly, this community has shown that the heart, generosity, knowledge, and willingness to make it happen are already here.

Level-Up 2026 began as a vision. Level-Up 2028 begins with a foundation.

We've made the shavings.

We've learned what we can accomplish together.

Now it's time to build on it.

Level-Up 2028 - we'll see you at the lathes.





Larry Brown and coach Patrick Hoggard in discussion at the lathe.



Coach Martin Clarkson with our newest turner, Ryan Putsky.



Steve Golombisky listens as coach Cayton Thigpen describes bowl gouge techniques.



Jayson Cote reminded us that although there was a lot of "business," there was a lot of funny business, too. Joe Gibson (center) and Neal Williams (left) watch as coach Patrick Hoggard shared techniques.



Hatch backs, truck beds, and even back seats both arrived and left full of wood. Attendees and coaches shared their wealth of knowledge and materials. Photo by Dave Kingsley.



Our vendor, Kirk Kapp of Kapp's Kreations never failed to share his experience, and had the Parfix ready to sell!



One of World Wide Woodturners' founding members, Tres Lennep, brought his rose engine lathe and decorated pieces for attendees.



Chairman of the board Scott Tague shared tips on bandsaw setup and use.

Demonstration versus Coaching: The Genius Idea Behind Level-Up

Editorial by Joaquin Juatai

One of the ways Level-Up re-wrote the “woodturning symposium formula” was the idea that we were not coming together to sit around and view demonstrations.

There’s a difference between demonstrating, instructing, and coaching at the lathe. The three cross paths: when you’re demonstrating, you can instruct – you can show specific techniques, little tricks, tips, and things like that. When you instruct, you can transcend mere instruction and coach. When you’re coaching, however, demonstrating and instructing take back seats.

Demonstrating is about showing your skills and showing how you do a project. Instructing is about showing attendees your process. Coaching is about imparting skills to the people with whom you are engaged as equals.

When you’re demonstrating, there’s one person in front of a lathe, showing their skills and sharing their techniques. Don’t get me wrong, people do learn from this. It’s not an invalid process, but it has its limitations.

When you’re instructing, everyone has a lathe,



The triumvirate behind the Level-Up revolution: WWW chairman of the board Scott Tague, director of international programs Martin Clarkson, and president Dane Chandler. Photo by Dane Chandler.

and the instructor has to take a step away after showing the technique to ensure each individual puts their hands on it and understands what it is that you’re teaching them.

Coaches take this a step further, standing elbow to elbow with the turner and making sure they have every opportunity to improve their skills.



Ninety minutes is a standard time for a demonstration. Demonstrators have to come prepared to perform a project (it is a performance), that can be completed in ninety minutes. There’s nothing wrong with that except that it’s the standard formula. Level-Up is all about re-writing the formula.

A hands-on coaching pod such as we saw at Level-Up, is different. Everyone has the chance for their coach to stand by their shoulder and critique their interpretation of the



Dale Slaughter at the lathe

techniques the coach is sharing. One-on-one, but also as a group, the collective atmosphere encourages all present to improve their abilities, no matter their experience level at the beginning of the day.

The standard for someone who might be asked to coach is that they're used to demonstrating, and in some cases, they make quite a good living doing demonstrations.

If we're lucky, an invited coach has experience educating. Teaching is either part of their progression or comes naturally to them.

What made Level-Up stand fully apart is that the demonstrator's ego must, as a matter of necessity, take the back seat. The point of a coaching encounter is the growth and improvement of all involved. Coaches should have the mindset that they're present to learn as well as impart.

This is the genius behind Level-Up;

instead of approaching the event with a demonstration mindset, the mindset of creating a collective environment where we are all in this together as equals was prevalent.

To me, sharing my personal knowledge with turners who had years of experience on me was humbling, and a little daunting. I found myself asking more than once, "Why are you taking my class? You should be teaching *me!*"

Coaching at Level-Up will forever be a seminal moment in my life. After 54 years of searching, and of thinking I was sure I knew, Level-Up showed me that this was my calling. I belong not only behind a lathe, but in front of it, elbow to elbow with my fellow turners, sharing, learning, and growing.

We came to Level-Up as a club, but a club of individuals, each with a slightly different idea of what we were undertaking. We left as a family, forever bonded by the love of the lathe, and a love of making shavings together.



Our shop away from home for Level-Up, the Grand Rapids Lions Club provided an ideal facility. Photo by Dane Chandler.



Coach Matt Harber shares air brush techniques in the off-lathe building, as a full house gathers around him.



Just a few of the items brought for the instant gallery.



Photographer Brent Sobotka (left) did get a few breaks, as Carl Geary (right) and Neal Williams join the table during Friday night's supper. Coach Matt Harber, No Band Aids Brenda Thornton and coach Safety Sue Jilek can be seen in the background. Photo by Dave Kingsley.



Coach Martin Clarkson in action.



Sandi Swayze stands at the lathe before a class. Photo by Joaquin Juatai.



No Band Aids Brenda Thornton at the lathe. Photo by Joaquin Juatai.



Coach Gary Hales, Bambi Golombisky, Doug Miller, and coach Matt Harber at the lathes.



In spite of being one of the few casualties of the weekend needing a band-aid, president Dane Chandler had a turn at the lathe as well.

Editor's note: There are so many more photos and faces to share, and only so much space in which to do so. Please know, your photo is just as important as every shot here, but space determines how many we could use.



Off lathe sessions occurred in a separate building where things were a little quieter. Chris Neilan (left) looks on as coach Matt Harber discusses pyrography techniques. Steve Golombisky and Brent Sobotka can be seen in the background. Photo by Joaquin Juatai.



Charlie Bundy and others look on as president Dane Chandler shares sharpening tips. Photo by Joaquin Juatai.



Level-Up 2026. We made the shavings!



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Wood Turners Worldwide

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