

A Chip Off the Old Block

BY DAVID PLASKOW, NJSCPA PUBLICATIONS EDITOR

“My dad was a Marine who served in WWII,” says Bernard R. Gingras, CPA. “I grew up in a household of eight people with one bathroom where you said ‘yes sir, no sir.’” That same sense of discipline and respect has served the younger Gingras well over the years.

Gingras grew up in Saddle Brook and married his high school sweetheart, Irene. While attending Upsala College in East Orange, Gingras thought about majoring in political science. “After a year, I felt with that degree my options were secretary of state or McDonalds,” jokes Gingras. So, he took some business courses and did well. “One long-time, well-respected accounting professor ‘conscripted’ me into accounting. He decreed that ‘from now on, you’re an accounting major until you change.’” Well, he never did change, and he graduated with a B.A. in accounting in 1973.

“I had a low draft number, so once I had left school I probably would have gone to Vietnam,” says Gingras. “So, I was accepted into a special program with the Marines that would have made me a second lieutenant. But the war ended and so did the program.”

During his senior year at Upsala, Gingras became an intern at John J. Eccelston & Company in Paramus. “I became a partner in 1976 and basically have since forgot what it’s like to work for someone else,” notes Gingras. The firm grew from four people to nearly 50, and by 1989 he felt it was time to go out on his own. “My firm is like the old country doctor, we do a lot of the basics and do them well,” says Gingras.

While at Eccelston, Gingras obtained his CPA certificate. “I actually passed two parts while I was in college,” remarks Gingras. “It was part of a

special program because a lot of people were graduating and then going straight to the war.”

Gingras talks about the CPA designation and wanting to be involved at a high level, achieving a degree of excellence and becoming prepared to lead others.

Not long after achieving the CPA credential, Gingras joined the New Jersey Society of CPAs. “The managing partner at my firm said ‘there’s a chapter meeting on Tuesday and you should go,’ so I went,” comments Gingras. That led to years of Society involvement and leadership positions, culminating in his presidency in 1994. “It was exciting being a guy from a small firm leading 15,000 colleagues. A couple of the big issues of the day were tort reform and privity,” recalls Gingras. “It’s pretty amazing where technology is today and the role it plays as opposed to just 20 years ago. I also notice that there’s much more practice specialization and product offerings now versus then.”

After Gingras’ term as NJSCPA President, he found himself with quite a bit of disposable time. Not to suggest that he was driving Irene crazy around the house, but she bought him two months of tuition at the American Woodcarving School in Wayne.

He practiced and honed his woodcarving skills at the school and in his basement studio to the point where he now has a website featuring a multitude of pieces. “I loved cowboy



and Indian movies as a kid, so I do a lot of western-themed sculptures,” notes Gingras.

The website, losthighwaycarving.com, is merely for display; it’s not a commercial site. “I don’t sell them, I do it for myself or to give sculptures as gifts,” says Gingras. “I’ve won a number of awards at shows, and that’s very gratifying.”

Gingras works in a variety of woods, typically bass wood, and each piece can take six to nine months to complete. “While woodcarving is clearly different than my day job, there’s a precision and creativity there that’s also present in accounting,” notes Gingras. “It’s been really interesting developing a part of me that wasn’t there before.”

There’s one piece that stands out on Gingras’ website called “Hill 382” which captures the bloodshed, horror and fear that Gingras’ dad and many other servicemen endured during the battle for Iwo Jima. The carving comes from a photo of that battle. While it’s not confirmed, Gingras is pretty certain that one of bloodied and bandaged men in the photo is his dad. “I just hope my carving did those Marines justice,” says Gingras. 🍷