

DECOY MAGAZINE

PUBLISHERS NOTE

MENTORING A NEW GENERATION

In the decoy collecting world, as in many other antique markets, there is a preponderance of gray hair, mine included. We all acknowledge the need to infuse more youth into our hobby, particularly if we're concerned about having a next generation of caretakers for our beloved objects. But are we making enough of an effort to help pave the way for new enthusiasts and give confidence to new recruits?

Back in the early days anyone with an interest in old decoys could assemble a quality collection. Yet as the market has matured over the decades, the ever-increasing cost of top notch birds has priced them out of the range of most young collectors who are saddled with other life responsibilities. So while we can't expect them to be kids, this new generation - whatever their age - could still be helped with a little mentoring, which veteran collectors can readily provide.

What I'm suggesting is that each collector should find a

novice enthusiast who needs a little direction and adopt him or her, so to speak. Too often new collectors are preyed upon by dealers who sell them their mistakes. It's like "eating our young" is how one collector put it. They end up with "beginner's decoys" is how some justify this transfer. Your job is to not let them make this mistake or otherwise some will feel taken advantage of and jump ship before we've had a chance to set the hook. After all, there are collectible decoys at all price ranges, so it's more than a matter of economics. So

What I'm suggesting is that each collector should find a novice enthusiast who needs a little direction and adopt him or her, so to speak.

pick one or two new collectors and vow to take them under your wing until they're ready to venture forth on their own.

If you meet a new collector in your neck of the woods, invite them over to see your decoys, and expertise. Talk about the

direction of your collection, how you went about choosing particular birds, how you got smarter and how you made better choices. Tell them how important it is to become an educated collector, what books they ought to read and which magazines will add to their knowledge. Make them aware of the importance of condition in determining value.

Don't try to determine or direct their interests, but help coach them. If they sees something they likes, point out its positives and negatives - sometimes collectors do have to make compromises. If they like something that you happen to have for sale, maybe give them a better deal than you might otherwise consider. Once a new collector actually owns a good decoy, there's a better chance he'll come back for another. If it's not quite within their budget, give them time to pay it off. Or as we call it, put them on the duck of the month club.

If you belong to a decoy collecting club, encourage them to join and attend the meetings. The social aspect of our hobby is an important part of our community. If you're a regular

on the decoy show circuit, get them to accompany you to a show. Introduce them to the dealers that can add to their collections and tell them which ones to avoid. If you take them to an auction, go through the preview and point out the good, the bad and the ugly. Even the auction houses, we all know, make mistakes. At all times, your primary mission is to keep them from making a mistake. And if you're a good teacher, they'll eventually learn to make good decisions for themselves. Remind them that it's what you learn after you know is all that really counts.

My advice to new collectors is to buy good examples within whatever price range they find comfortable. If you put something good under your

arm and walk around a decoy show someone will ask if it's for sale. No educated collector wants to buy a compromised example, no matter who made it – so don't just collect names. And if you can't find something you like that you can afford today, take your time, save up a bit more money and you'll be happy you did. There's no urgency to buy a decoy at every show or auction you attend. Patience can be a virtue.

Now I realize there are many out there who have already taken many novices under their wing. They appreciate the help they received when they first began this journey and wish to pass this goodwill forward. And we realize that even good intentions are sometimes in vain. After all,

you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink it. But it doesn't hurt to try.

We should all make a concerted effort to help train this next generation of decoy collectors. In the next decade or so thousands of top quality decoys will come onto the market, either through private sales or on the auction block. We need to ensure that a new generation is ready to enthusiastically buy them. So do your share and adopt a new collector today. And be willing to help them out, even if they already have gray hair.

Joe Engers

Reprinted with permission of Joe Engers, Publisher, *Decoy Magazine*.