

Managing the Micro Meet

Ron and Kristi Percell's Micro Meet draws attendees with exciting projects and down-home hospitality.

What do chickens, *American Graffiti*, and signs have in common? Not much, unless you're talking about Petaluma, California.

Not only is this California town the largest egg producer in the country and the location for half the scenes filmed for Writer-Director George Lucas's 1973 blockbuster about cruising, but every September for the past five years, it has served as home for the Micro Meet hosted by Percell Signs owner Ron Percell and his wife Kristi.

While you won't find Ron gilding hens' eggs or driving down Main Street in a '57 Chevy, you might find him doing some very fine glass gilding, carving a chicken into a block of HDU, or heat-bending PVC into curved pieces for his next sign gig.

There are only a few Letterhead meets here on the West Coast each year, but none of them are quite like Percell's Micro Meet, a three-day event held this past September 14-16. Ron attributes his event's appeal to the "country set-

ting and home-cooked meals, along with the fact that we're not a sign supplier."

Instructors showed up early on Friday, with plenty of time to catch up with old friends, share news, and talk about the terrorist attacks that occurred earlier that week. Because of the smaller group size (according to Ron, there were "ten fewer attendees than usual due to flights being canceled or rescheduled"), the atmosphere was more laid back than before.

By early Saturday morning, though, the "barn" was buzzing with activity and excitement. Some demonstrated a technique or special tool they had discovered. Others simply watched or asked questions.

Gary Erickson of Surfside Signs in Soquel, California demonstrated how to carve high-density urethane (HDU) signs. His instructions were easy to understand, good news for the many who had never held a carving tool in their hands before confidently learning a new skill!

I started a mural panel with help from the students of Los Angeles TradeTech College. This talented group of young people travel over five hundred miles from Los Angeles each year to attend this meet. I'm truly inspired and amazed by the enthusiasm and willingness to learn these folks have. They've even taught me a few things!

Elsewhere on the grounds, Mike Languen showcased faux-wood graining techniques. A 1977 graduate of the L.A. TradeTech, Mike currently works at the Walt Disney Company's sign shop in Anaheim, California. He is an experienced fine sign writer and possesses a knack for creating some truly amazing faux antique signs and finishes.

Mike later told me at the Meet that he and his co-workers at Disney's sign department regularly get together after hours to experiment with various techniques in faux finishes, and he unveiled some of these here.



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Elsewhere, Richard Bustamante of Fresno, California demonstrated a "wet-on-wet" technique with rattle cans, a fun example of what anyone can learn to do with simple and inexpensive materials and tools, while veteran sign painters like Jim Moser of Grass Valley, California instructed young people in the art of pinstripping.

I recently had the great pleasure to sit down with Ron and ask him some questions about his highly valued Letterhead meet.

SBI: What makes this event different from some of the larger meets, like an international one, for instance?

Ron Percell: Attendance, for one thing. We average about sixty to seventy-five people.

SBI: How did you come about calling it the "Micro Meet?"

RP: Through the Letterhead Web site, located at www.letterhead.com, I learned that Francisco Vargas was finishing up his "Traveling Millennium Sign Artist Tour" from the West Coast to the East Coast and Back, and that he was coming through here with a friend of his, Richard Bustamante. I thought it would be a perfect time to host a meet, so I posted a date on the site.

While posting the date, I realized I needed a name or theme for the meet and seeing that the Internet and computers were helping us make our connection, I thought it would only be right to call it "Micro Meet," because of the microchips in our computers that were helping us meet. In fact, 80 percent of the first meet consisted of discussions on computers (i.e., designing, programs, filters, Web sites, etc.)

SBI: Those who have attended past Micro Meets will tell you that the warm hospitality you and Kristi offer keeps them coming back year after year. What do you think of that?

RP: It's truly amazing how Letterheads can draw such diverse individuals, who in turn, become an extended part of your family. I have to say that it's the fellow Letterheads that truly make our meet so special.

SBI: What are your visions for future Micro Meets? Would you like to see any changes?



Ron Percell

RP: I'd really like to see the diversity in talent continue. The meet has brought together such a variety of the best crafts people in the business, and it's even been a great source for employees. There are a few surprises that we've got in the idea

box, like local tours that relate to different specialties.

SBI: Finally, is there anything else you'd like to comment on?

RP: I'd like to thank all the folks who help make the Micro Meet possible—from the attendants to suppliers and staff. Thank you, from the bottom of our hearts!

For those of you who have never attended a live Letterheads meet, I urge you to do so this year. Not only will you learn something new and valuable you can add to your business, but you might find yourself teaching someone else! No matter what your skill level, there is always someone who could use a little guidance and encouragement from you.

That's what being a Letterhead is all about—sharing the craft we love. And who knows, you might make some new friends! ☺

For further information about attending this year's Micro Meet, visit www.percellsigns.com. To learn more details about upcoming Letterhead meets, log on to www.letterhead.com.

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