

## **Las Vegas 2016: The West Coast Pipe Show in its 8th Year and Still Going Strong!**

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Yes, my friends, it was another great show. The story begins on Saturday November 5, when 8 a.m. rolled around and the exhibitors began assembling their displays. While last minute no-shows are to be expected at any event, I counted only a handful of empty tables this time, so WCPS 2016 was off to an excellent start. With 105 tables filled to capacity, a long line formed up to open the show at 10. Now it's go time!

Before I continue, here's my standard caveat. Taking notes and trying to remember the particulars of everyone who exhibited is at best challenging. It is inevitable that some exhibitors got overlooked, so I offer my apologies to those who I did not include in this report. Okay, let's check out the scenery...

I'll lead off with the people who made their WCPS debut in November. First up, the pipemakers: Neal Monier (Garage Made Pipe Tool, Orange County CA), David Huber (DSH Pipes, Durham NC), Matt Tressor (M.T.T. Pipes, Escondido CA), Richard Lawton (Briar Art Pipes, Port Orchard WA. This was his first-ever show), William Moore (Portland OR, another brand new entry to the show scene), Michal Novak (Novak Pipes – he came all the way from the Czech Republic!), Steve Norse (Vermont Freehand, Dorset VT. By the way, Steve recently acquired Pimo), and Joe Nelson (Old Nellie Pipes, Fond du Lac WI). On the retailer side, Sam Tisler (Winston's Emporium, Ft. Smith AR) joined us as a first-time exhibitor. On the distributor side, Pacific Territory Sales Manager Joseph Fabian represented Laudisi Distribution Group.

While it's always exciting to have new exhibitors join the big party in Vegas, there were some especially notable first-timers here. How about Missouri Meerschaum? Pipe smokers have known and loved their corncobs for many years, and it was wonderful to see MM finally putting on a display right from the source. Of course there's the other kind of Meerschaum – definitely *not* from Missouri, as Director of Turkish Meerschaum Pipe Ismail Celebi took a very long trip from his home country to show his wares. Formerly hosted on eBay, Pipe Hub introduced us to a new and innovative online approach to buying and selling pipes. Next, we have Roswitha Anderson (Pipes & Pleasures, Columbus OH). I first met her at the 1987 Pipe Collectors International convention in Columbus. What a pleasant surprise it was to see her again after all those years, still wearing two hats as a tobacconist and pipemaker. That wasn't the only surprise, as I was also pleased to see Mike Butera and Greg Pease. Mike went to WCPS 2015, although he didn't take a table then. This time he did. Greg was there in November – no table, but great to see him at the show. (I was hoping he'd make it one of these days!)

We're building a nice long list, so as we forge ahead, here are some of the people who displayed at the show for the second time: Ryan Alden (Alden Pipes, Rowlett TX), Franklin and Cynthia Korn of Cynthia Ellen Imports (San Diego, CA), online estate retailer pipingainteasy.com, Seattle Pipe Club president Matt Guss showing the SPC's custom-blended tobaccos, collectors Rene Contreras and Larry Lampner, The Briar Patch (brick-and-mortar tobacco shop – the last one left in Sacramento, CA after Jon's Front Street Tobacconist closed in 2014), BriarWorks International, and briarlab was back to guide you through what this amazing (and in my opinion, completely unique) company can offer. Danish pipemaker Kurt Balleby (Balleby Pipes) exhibited for the first time in 2010, and he returned for the second time at WCPS 2016. Great to have you with us again, Kurt!

American pipecraft has been a major presence at the show ever since its upward trajectory started in 2010. So here are more names for you – some of the following carvers came to Las Vegas for their 3rd or 4th year, others

pretty much every year since WCPS was being established as a national event: Colin Rigsby (Shurewood Briar Pipes, Ft. Worth TX), Will Jennings (Buffalo WY), Richard Friedman (Bellingham WA), Mark Stout (M. Stout Pipes, Ladera Ranch CA), pipemaking couple Brad Pohlmann and his fiancé Silver Gray (Jacksonville OR), Bill Walther (Walther Smoking Pipes, Arlington TX), Don Marshall (D. Marshall Handcrafted Smoking Pipes, Buckeye AZ), Jeff Burt-Gracik (J. Alan Pipes, San Diego CA), Bob Kiess (Dr. Bob Pipes, Sharon VT), Nathan Armentrout (Armentrout Pipes, Lancaster CA), Don Gillmore (Don Warren Pipes, Albuquerque NM), Anthony Harris (Acme Woodturning, Kansas City KS), Jim Deschaine (J. Deschaine Smoking Pipes, Auburn CA), plus Victor Rimkus (Rimkus Pipes, Edgewood NM) and his son Nathan (N.W.R. Pipes, Los Alamos NM). Can't forget about British presence at the show, as craftsman Jim Craig of Ashton Pipes was back for his 5th year in Vegas. Last, but certainly not least, the "dean of American pipemakers" Paul Perri was there with his lovely and gracious wife Margaret. If you took the opportunity to spend time with the Perris at their display, you were in for a treat – it's a blessing to know them, and no exaggeration to say that Paul is a living legend.

This covers the returning pipemakers, so we'll continue with our list of repeat exhibitors on the retail and distribution side: Shane Ireland and Joshua Burgess of Smokingpipes.com, Sally Gottliebson (The Pipe Tart), Mike Glukler of Briar Blues, Brian Levine representing Sutcliffe/MacBaren, Kevin Brackett (Tobacco Pipe Exports), Smoker's Haven (Columbus OH), Wayne and Cynthia Toscas of Mr. T's Estate Pipes (Pismo Beach CA), Mark Ryan of Daughters & Ryan Tobacco, followed by online retailer and estate pipe restorer/eBay guru Chance Whittamore (Great Estate Pipes). I'll give special (and I mean *very* special) mention to the two people who wear big hats of their own – Messrs. Steve O'Neill (pulling triple duty as the show's organizer, host, and a great pipe restorer in his own right), and WCPS consultant/advisor Marty Pulvers of Pulvers Prior Briar.

Because collectors and pipe clubs are a cornerstone of the hobby, their representation at the show continued to be an important part of the WCPS experience. The folks in this category are WCPS veterans, some going all the way back to the first show in 2009. Our California contingent included Bruce Kaiser, Lowell Ellis (great guy, and his estate pipes are always priced fairly), Joe Kappell, collector and renowned author Rick Newcombe (*In Search of Pipe Dreams*), Tom Pfaeffle and Tim Dowell (good friends from the Northern California Pipe Show days), and Al Grosskopf. We also had Jeff Knoll and Eddie Fliess representing the North American Society of Pipe Collectors, Brian Burk, Pete Prygelski, collector extraordinaire Dennis Congos, Rex Poggenpohl of the Chicagoland Pipe Collectors Club, Andy Camire, and Rolf Nestingen.

I'll describe the doings on Saturday in just two words – nonstop action! No amount of verbiage can do justice to the incredible time we had that day, although the photo gallery you'll find on the WCPS website will give you a flavor for what it was like. (Unfortunately a videographer wasn't available for this go-round, but those still pics are pretty dang good!) As the happy chaos died down at 5 p.m., Palace Station security battened down the hatches as the catering staff prepared for the Awards dinner. Cocktails in the lounge or decompress in your hotel room if that's your preference, then it was time to make our way in for dinner at 7. After a hectic day on the floor, being able to socialize with friends old and new gives us the chance to relax and enjoy our special camaraderie. While this is a wonderful part of any pipe show, those who've had the experience before will agree that WCPS has become one of the premier show dinners in the country. The food being offered at the buffet was up to the Palace Station's usually high standards, and our dinner included red and white wines compliments of the show, followed by a scrumptious dessert selection with coffee or tea.

When we finished enjoying our meals, Steve O'Neill took to the podium and introduced guest speaker Marty Pulvers. With his many years of experience in the business, Marty's insight into the challenges of the pipe trade gave us an interesting view on the current state of retailing. May seem like kind of a dry subject, but his special brand of humor made for one of the best dinner talks we've had since the show kicked off in '09. The evening concluded with Steve's presentation of the show awards to Phil and Patricia Morgan of Missouri Meerschaum

for Best Display, and Kurt Balleby for Best Pipe. There was plenty more socializing after dinner, helped by the hour we got back when daylight savings time ended that night – what a fantastic Saturday!

The ballroom had airtight security over everything, so when 9 a.m. came on Sunday, the exhibitors didn't need much to get their displays back up. Then it was go time again at 10 as the show reopened to the public. In previous years day two had been pretty phenomenal, but things were more subdued this time around. And if there was a reason, it had to be a serious matter that weighed on everyone's mind – an aspect of the weekend's discussions we couldn't avoid.

In the Fall 2016 issue of *Pipes & Tobaccos* magazine, P&T alerted the American pipe world to a massive set of new regulations by the FDA aimed at not just tobacco, but pipemaking as well. How the Food and Drug Administration has gone so far beyond its original mandate is beyond all rational understanding, although we can thank Barack “I have a pen and a phone” Obama for attempting to smash our hobby with an iron fist. If you thought the new regs had yet to be implemented, sadly you would've found out that one was already in place before we arrived at the show. Lane Ltd.-Stokkebye had a lovely tobacco bar all set up – fire up your pipes for tasting, right? Wrong. That's when we found out that tobacco sampling is now prohibited by the FDA. Candidate Donald Trump vowed to reverse the massive federal regulatory overreach implemented by Obama. Good news for us was that he included the FDA in his list of agencies that need to be slashed. It remains to be seen if President Trump makes good on his promise, but his track record so far should give us hope. (Establishment Republicans have been as anti-tobacco as Democrats. While I don't intend to turn this report into a political discussion, there's no doubt about the fact we're lucky to have someone who's not a career politician in the oval office. If anyone is likely to neuter the FDA, it'll be Trump.) More about that in just a moment, but first...

We'll acknowledge some people who richly deserve a hearty “thank you.” Everyone who attended the show owes Steve and Linda O'Neill, and Marty Pulvers a huge debt of gratitude for all the tremendous work they've been doing. Their success is the reason why the West Coast Pipe Show continues to keep going strong. A special thanks to the generous individuals who donated all the items that went into the weekend raffle, and we can't thank the staff of the Palace Station Hotel and Casino enough – they treat us so well, and do a superb job on all fronts. And finally, I'd like to thank computer guru and webmaster Dennis Smith for maintaining a phenomenal web presence on the WCPS site, one of the best (if not *the* best) show websites you'll find out there in cyberspace. If you haven't been to the show before, go to <http://www.westcoastpipeshow.com>, and you'll get a taste of what you've been missing.

Will there be another show? Heck yeah, and regardless of what happens with the FDA, you can count on another excellent weekend. I'll go even farther by recommending that you follow President Trump's lead – double down on the FDA bureaucrats and make an extra-special effort to attend the 9th (that's right, 9th!) Annual West Coast Pipe Show at the Palace Station on November 4 and 5.

Hope to see you then!