

## **Political cartoonist Boyd sculpting 'Foxworthy's Folks' into series of collectibles**

*Editor's Note: Times-Herald feature writer Alex McRae has taken fingers to keyboard to share a new turn in the life of Newnan political cartoonist and good friend, David Boyd. With the help of friend and editorial columnist Mike Steed and his son Zach, Boyd is transforming his "You Might Be A Redneck..." characters from Jeff Foxworthy's books into collectible figurines -- and has found a new talent, sculpting.*

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With his interest waning and his handicap rising, R. David Boyd knew he needed to find a new game. After considerable thought, Boyd quit playing golf and started playing God.

At least the story lines are vaguely similar, to wit:

In the beginning, God created man in His image. In his kitchen, Boyd created an image of a man. There was one small difference. God made Adam. Boyd came up with Harvell.

But Boyd's act of creation comes at the end of this story, not the beginning, which dates back thirtysomething years, when a young, sleek, R. David Boyd blew into Newnan in his young, sleek, MG motorcar to take over the reins of the local Chamber of Commerce. Boyd's charming ways and business acumen so impressed the local establishment that he was soon offered a chance to try his hand in the cutthroat world of commerce. Not long afterwards -- (although Boyd claims his presence had nothing to do with it) -- his newly adopted business went belly up.

Boyd was so shaken by the experience he decided to leave town. All the motels in Panama City Beach were booked, so he went to Australia. "It was as far as I could go and still be in a country where people spoke English," he explains.

While Down Under, he traveled as extensively as he could, given his limited budget. But the ever-resourceful Boyd had a talent for drawing that had impressed his schoolmates at The Citadel, and he decided to try his hand at some Aussie portraiture. To his amazement, Boyd found the Australians eager to acquire his quirky caricatures in exchange for small sums of cash or large quantities of free alcoholic beverages.

One of his Australian subjects remarked that Boyd was every bit as good as Pat Oliphant, the Australian native who had moved to America a few years earlier and become a Pulitzer Prize-winning political cartoonist. That chance remark was all it took to change Boyd's life. Sort of.

Boyd returned to Newnan with a renewed zeal for life and vowed that he would never go hungry again. (Sorry, wrong story). He vowed that from that day on, he would make a living with pen and ink. Then he bought a pen. And some ink. And finally, a tablet.

Boyd began sketching political cartoons and soon found he had a knack for it, maybe even a gift. He hit the road and successfully peddled his cartoons to several papers across the South, including The Times-Herald (whose management to this day denies it only bought Boyd's cartoons to make him quit pestering them). As his success grew, Boyd formed his own publishing syndicate, Mark-Morgan Features, and his cartoons at one time were featured in over 200 papers.

During those heady years, Boyd managed to convince a lovely local lass, Rosalyn McKoy, to marry him. The couple produced three children; and Boyd gradually took on the appearance of normalcy... except for his table manners.

In the late 1980s, Boyd's acquaintance with internationally-known author and Moreland native, Lewis Grizzard, grew into a deep friendship; and Boyd's reputation rose after illustrating several of Grizzard's books.

In 1989, executives at Longstreet Press called Boyd with a new project. Longstreet had just contracted to publish a book of jokes by a relatively unknown Atlanta comic named Jeff Foxworthy. Boyd was asked to illustrate it. He did so for the price of a plane ticket to Scotland to play golf with Grizzard and another pal, Mike Steed, who, when he wasn't penning columns for Boyd's syndicate, was a textile tycoon in Bowdon, Ga.

"You Might be A Redneck If..." was an instant national best seller, and Foxworthy soon became the hottest comic in America. The characters Boyd created for Foxworthy's books soon found themselves plastered on all manner of redneck-related products, from CD covers to calendars to t-shirts to beer caddies.

But despite his newfound success and notoriety, Boyd felt something was missing in his life... his passion for the two-dimensional world. "I was just getting tired of drawing," he explains. "I was ready to move on to something else."

Ironically, at about the time Boyd was contemplating moving on to greener pastures, Zach Steed, son of Mike, and a fellow textile magnate in the family firm, had a vision.

The younger Steed was a collectibles buff, especially fond of figurines. Steed had noticed that there seemed to be a collectible figure for just about every hobby, like or lifestyle. Everywhere he looked he saw figurines featuring dogs, cats, angels, devils, golfers, gophers, even NASCAR vehicles.

Steed thought there just might be a market for a line of figurines based on Boyd's redneck characters.

One day Steed was in the driveway pondering the idea when his neighbor stopped by for a chat. The neighbor casually mentioned he had just started doing business with a company in China that made -- of all things -- figurines! Just like the ones Steed wanted to produce.

Zach went to his father and the two Steeds approached Boyd about using his images for their figurines. Boyd listened carefully and finally said..."Uh, OK."

Foxworthy was approached and immediately signed on to endorse and promote the product and to write the mini-biographies which accompany each character. Finally, last Summer, "Foxworthy's Folks" by R. David Boyd was born.

The immediate problem was rendering Boyd's paper images into three-dimensional characters. Drawings were shipped to China where artisans molded the prototypes. Even Boyd was surprised at how well the Chinese captured the feel of his images, but he suggested some changes and the figures were sent back to be reworked. The next batch was even closer, but still... not quite perfect. They lacked something Boyd couldn't put his finger on. So he put his finger on a piece of clay and tried to do it himself.

At that moment, R. David Boyd, who had never had a sculpting lesson in his life, became one. "It was amazing," he says. "I just started working that clay and it did what I wanted and all of a sudden, those things started to come to life."

Once Boyd got started, he couldn't stop. "I was having a ball," he says. "I felt like a kid again." Soon, the misguided Michelangelo was cranking out carvings by the car load. Beneath his supple (if somewhat flat and unattractive) fingers, the clay came to life. Boyd rendered Harvell, the chainsaw-toting handyman, and molded the sumptuous lines of Precious, the chicken choking, no-nonsense homemaker who is never out of her curlers or far from her snuff can. Others followed, including Angel, in a white wedding gown, holding one infant in her arms as she incubates another; Sprayberry, the pet pig; and little Skeeter, sharing a bubble bath with his dog, Mitch.

The characters are produced by Steed Products Inc. which is also responsible for their sales and marketing. Fortunately, Boyd is not involved in this process. Recently, when asked what the market was for his creations, Boyd said, "I have no idea."

Fortunately, Zach Steed does. The figures have been presented at national trade shows, and field reps are currently marketing them to high-end gift and collectible shops. The collection is also featured on its own website, [www.foxworthysfolks.com](http://www.foxworthysfolks.com), which was designed by Noah Steed, of the Bowdon Steeds.

Locally, the figures will be carried by The Wynn House on Spring. Owner Georgia Shapiro says the entire collection first edition of 10 figures is not expected on the shelves for several weeks, but she is already taking orders for the little people. When the figures arrive, Shapiro plans to host an open house featuring the figurines and their creator.

After mastering the artist's pen and the sculptor's chisel, Boyd feels there is only one peak left to conquer in the arty Alps, one medium he has yet to master. It may be tough going, but Boyd is convinced that given the right tools, he'll find a way to make a masterpiece from a slab of barbecued pork.