

Give Me a Hand

By David E. Parvin, A.L.I.,

As I am starting to write this article, I'm feeling pretty smug. It just so happens that yesterday I reaffirmed my position as a world record holder. Yesterday 23 assistants and myself cast 661 hands in 5 hours for an average rate of one hand every 27.3 seconds. While not a personal best which was last year when we did 768 hands for a rate of one every 23.4. But conditions were far from ideal yesterday. As we were rounding the far turn, teeing off on the 18th hole, completing the last pit stop, it started to rain. The rain reduced the number of castees willing to stand in line. Nevertheless, 661 is almost certainly more than anyone else has ever done in the same time period. Yesterday's combined with the what we have done on the last Saturday in July for the previous fourteen years not only assures me the the most in five hours record but almost as surely gives me the record for the most hands cast in a lifetime. I have to humbly point out that I regularly do hand (and feet and face and torso) casting in my studio as well and have been doing so for over twenty years all of which count as well. Yes, I suspect that I hold a number of world records and my place in the Life Casting Hall of Fame is assured. What about my 23 assistants, well, this is the real world, the big leagues where they do almost all the work but I get all the credit.

I hope by this time any reader has realized that this guy Parvin is one conceited S.O.B. or he is leading up to a point. Well, the truth is "yes and yes." What we did yesterday was have a profitable day in a very weak art market. I would like to explain just how this happened in hopes that someone may benefit from my experience and do something similar.

It all began about fifteen years ago when I answered the phone, "This is Dave." The voice on the other end of the line replied, "Is this Dave Parvin the sculptor?" Right then I was pretty sure that I was going to like whatever came next because because the caller was impressed and respectful enough to call me "THE SCULPTOR." Besides, when someone calls you who already knows who you are it is going to be so much easier. After all, you lose a little of your bargaining power if you have to tell someone that you are indeed famous. The call was from the director of a local art center and she wanted to know if I would be willing to participate in a kids' art day by casting hands. Not only did she say the ten little magic words that open any door with ease, "We will pay you and your helpers and for all materials," but it just so happened that the particular suburb is the wealthiest in the Denver area. While one of "Dave's Laws" clearly displayed on my studio wall is, "We are not like Robin Hood, Robin Hood robbed from the rich, we rob



The 60 by 20 foot tent we cast the hands looked like this, full of people for five hours. In the foreground, young people either have their hands in alginate or are about to.



At the other end of the tent, the person on the left is one of four persons is mixing and pouring alginate. We used about 450 pounds of alginate. The two on the right are mixing and pouring white hydrocol. We used all of the eight bags of hydrocol shown.



The kids are waiting in line holding the containers with their names and assigned numbers printed on the sides. The bags are full of two liter soft drink plastic bottles. Outside the tent are finished hands laid out by their numbers for easy identification.

from everybody,” I have found the Robin had it right, there is just so much more you can rob from the rich. I accepted the offer.

That first year I showed up with two helpers and though I don't remember just how many hands we did, it couldn't have been very many. Even though the event was new and not very well attended we were not able cast every hand that wanted it. Nevertheless, we were invited back the following year with permission to bring additional helpers. I think I showed up that year with about five. It took about ten years for the kids' art day to reach it maximum size and for our numbers to grow to accommodate all who want a hand casting.

Whenever I look at something incredibly complicated such as an aircraft carrier, I always wonder how any one could possibly design something so complex. The truth is that if there were no boats, much less ships, it would probably be impossible to start off with an aircraft carrier. But it all started with someone standing on a log and pushing himself across a small body of water with a pole. After a couple thousand years, someone tied two logs together and the first raft was invented. More time passed and the logs were hollowed, sails were added and so forth until step by step we ended up with a hundred thousand ton aircraft carrier with a crew of five thousand.

I am not saying that casting six or seven hundred hands is comparable to designing and constructing a mighty warship, but if I had been asked to do as many hands as we do now at from the get go, I couldn't have done it. By learning a little every year, the process just naturally evolved. Let me give you some examples. Having discovered that an ideal casting container was a two liter soft drink container it is just the right size and is also transparent and one can see if the child is touching the side which would result in a flat spot. So for the first few years, I went to the recycle drop off place at my local supermarket and picked up what I estimated I would need. I then cut the tops off by hand with a box cutter. But as the numbers grew year after year, it got to be a longer and longer process. We finally came up with a better solution. The city talks a soft drink bottler into donating all the new bottles we need. City workers pick the bottles up and slice off the tops with a band saw. Also, since a two liter container is larger than needed for the younger children, the city gets one quart deli containers from a local supermarket. The city even delivers the both sizes of the containers to the casting location and I am completely out of the loop.

Another example, the first couple of years, we not only cast the hands, but we also demolded them as well. Well, demolding takes far longer than casting. Not only do you have to wait until the white hydrocal has set up, but you have to very carefully remove the hand from the alginate or you will break off a finger or two or three, etc. Then you have the likelihood the child will break off a few fingers taking the hand home. I decided to print out a very detailed description on demolding and attach it to every hand while still in the alginate and the container. Now the child takes his/her hand home relatively protected by the plastic container which gives the hand time to be well set up. Also, several family members have an opportunity to get involved with the demolding. Lastly, on the back side of the direction,

I have space to describe the David E. Parvin Studio and what services we offer.

It is not the purpose of this article to explain all the tricks and what is involved in casting a large number of hands. I only want to point out again that I have mentioned in some previous articles that sometimes an opportunity comes up that is somewhat outside what we normally do. The first time I did this project, it really looked like more of an inconvenience than anything else. But as the project has grown, so has my compensation. I am now VERY WELL PAID. Also, I get to provide some work for other people both skilled and unskilled. And don't forget that there are a whole bunch of rich folk who have casts of their children's hands on their mantles.

If anybody has an opportunity to do a similar project, please feel free contact me and I will provide a whole bunch more information about materials and equipment, how to find helper, how to divide the work between all the helpers, etc. But be creative and survive to sculpt another day.