

2024 Evans McKinney Old Decoy Contest

By Chad Tragakis

For longtime and newer collectors alike, one of the highlights of the annual Havre de Grace Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival is the Evans McKinney Old Decoy Contest, sponsored by Decoy Magazine and named for the beloved pioneer Susquehanna Flats collector and author, J. Evans McKinney. Each year, collectors enter their favorite pieces in ten different categories, which are then carefully evaluated by a rotating panel of three judges, tasked with selecting a winner in each category along with a first, second and third best-in-show. There were 115 decoys entered this year, a record in the 21-year history of the competition. Once again, the contest was coordinated by volunteers from the Potomac Decoy Collectors Association in partnership with Ginny and Lloyd Sanders from the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum. Judging this year were veteran collectors Steve Brown, Jim Van Ness and Bill Waibel.



J. Evans McKinney Old Decoy Competition Judges. (L to R: Bill Waibel, Steve Brown, and Jim Van Ness)

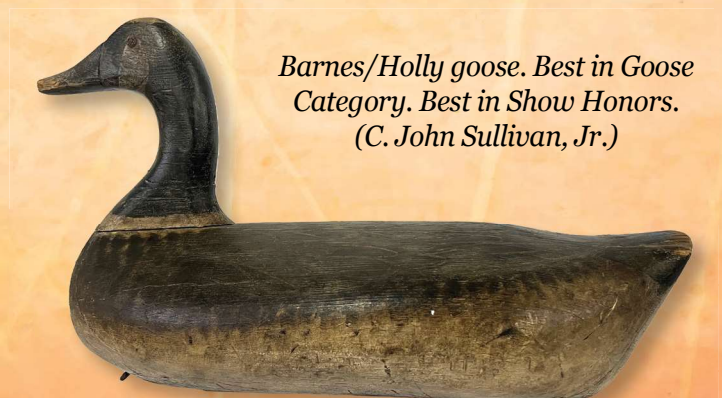
C. John Sullivan, Jr. earned first place in the Canada Goose category with a Barnes/Holly goose, which also took Best-in-Show honors. Sullivan's handsome honker is one of about a dozen or so known examples, which feature characteristics of both Sam Barnes and Jim Holly, early makers from Havre de Grace, Maryland. Thus, these decoys have been dubbed Barnes/Holly, and may be the result of collaboration between the two. A sculptural pair of Scott Jackson canvasbacks from the rig of Lew Pennock, and so branded, earned first place in the Cecil County Canvasback category for S.R. Smith, and they also earned second best-in show. John Henry won the Harford County Bluebill category with a blackhead by Jim Holly, also taking third best-in-show.



Chad Tragakis presents C. John Sullivan, Jr. with Best in Show Honors

David Farrow won the Rock Hall Puddle Duck category with a sleek pair of pintails by John Glenn. Chad and Christy Tragakis won the Hoopers Island Merganser category with a pair of high-head red-breasted mergansers by Capt. Gene Travers, formerly in the collection of Bobby Richardson and one of his favorite pairs of "fence-post pheasants." They also won the Jim Pierce Decoy category with an early working coot in sleeping position, formerly in the collection of Henry Fleckenstein. John Graf won the Balsa Wood Decoy category with a classic 1948 style canvasback drake by the Ward brothers.

Jamie Bowden won the Chincoteague category with an early bluebill drake by Ira Hudson, which he recently acquired from the collection of Dr. Jack Marsh. John Henry won the Unknown category with a finely carved redhead drake, which some collectors have ascribed to Long Island, others to the Potomac River, and still others to locations in between. Ron Lewicki won the Root Head category with another unknown, this one an early gunning brant made and used on Long Island, New York.



*Barnes/Holly goose. Best in Goose Category. Best in Show Honors.
(C. John Sullivan, Jr.)*



A sculptural pair of Scott Jackson canvasbacks. Best Cecil County Canvasback Category. Second Best in Show Honors. (S.R. Smith)

Blackhead by Jim Holly. Best Harford County Bluebill Category. Third Best in Show Honors. (John Henry)



John Glenn pintail pair. Best Rock Hall Category. (David Farrow)

Pair of Capt. Gene Travers high-head red breasted mergansers. Best Hooper's Island Category. (Chad & Christy Tragakis)



Early working sleeping coot by Jim Pierce. Best Jim Pierce Category. (Chad & Christy Tragakis)

1948 Ward brothers canvasback. Best Balsa Wood Category. (John Graf)



Finely carved redhead drake (Long Island/Potomac River). Best Unknown Category. (John Henry)



Early bluebill drake by Ira Hudson. Best Chincoteague Category. (Jamie Bowden)



Early gunning brant. Maker unknown. Best Root Head Category. (Ron Lewicki)