

Aaron Frederick brings his Navy Special Ops background into the design of his tactical knives. He was a top maker before he joined the U.S. Navy.



If the Manti mark and the overall appearance don't tip you off with this Best Tactical award-winning Mitch Jenkins knife, it is obvious that he has spent a lot of time in the Steve Johnson shop.



Steve Rapp demonstrates with this Bowie why he is one of America's top knifemakers.



Gray Taylor's award-winning folder features carved pearl, gold pins and bolser, along with inlaid pique pins in the pearl.



Gray Taylor carved this black pearl three-blade with gold fitting. It sold at SOS.

Knife shows have their ups and downs, and the *Knives Illustrated* Spirit of Steel Knife Show is not immune, but this year's move to Knoxville, Tennessee, from the Dallas Metro area heralded a repositioning of the show.

ORIGINAL CONCEPT

The show was originally designed to be a large, general-interest knife show, centrally located near an airline hub with an adjoining hotel, in a geographic area known for knife interest. The reason I know this is that in addition to being your editor, I am also the founder and manager of this show—which we note here in the interest of full disclosure.

The first location that fit the criteria of that time was the Mesquite Convention Center, in Mesquite, Texas, a Dallas suburb that would allow show visitors to take advantage of the Dallas-Fort Worth airlines hub.

HANDMADE JUDGES

Jack Alsop
Mark Strauss
Les Robertson

MANUFACTURER AWARD JUDGES

Ethan Becker
David Mullins
David Beckler

The second show was pre-9-11, and that tragedy occurred a few weeks prior to the 2001 SOS show. Regulations that followed made flying with knives even more difficult, and the complexion of the knife show changed. A new venue was selected at the Hilton, in Grapevine, Texas, a site chosen for its immediate proximity to the DFW airport. It was also within a short drive of Fort Worth.

With the economic crash of 2008-2009

Diana Casteel is married to knifemaker Doug Casteel, but with work such as this, she demonstrates that she is a top knifemaker in her own right.



The knives taking home Best Knife of 2010-2011: Kershaw multi-tool, Winchester stag-handled whittler, Emerson Roadhouse model and an elegant Cas Hanwei folder.



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Ken, Courtney and Ryan Daniels together comprise the driving force behind Great Eastern Cutlery, producing classic patterns of high quality.



Columbia River Knife and Tool presented a wide array of quality cutlery, with its booth manned by Jennifer and Trey Lloyd.



Jessica Hall, of Hallmark Cutlery, handles the importation of Kissing Crane and Uzi brand knives.



Bear & Sons, of Jacksonville, Alabama, is one of the largest remaining American-based cutlery manufacturers.



Rick Joswick and Mike Mathews, of Utica/Kutmaster, represent what is probably the oldest remaining U.S. manufacturer. Surviving means they've done something right, such as changing with the times, as evidenced by the innovative patterns displayed at SOS.



Morgan Taylor, of Taylor Brands, LLC, displayed both the Schrade and Smith & Wesson knives produced by the company.



The judging for Best Knife awards at the Emerson booth. Judges were David Beckler, of *Knives Illustrated*, David Mullins, vice president of the National Knife Collectors Association, and Ethan Becker, of Becker Knife & Tool (Becker's and Kabar's knives, for whom he designs, were not entered in the competition).

and the due date of a grandchild both conflicting with the show date, the 2009 show was postponed, along with a proposed third venue change in the Dallas area. However, the facilities available for knife shows had changed, as well, and no venue could be located in the Dallas area that offered the

amenities, price range and available dates required to produce the show.

NEW LOCATION

When considering new locations and venues for the SOS show, the changing state of knife shows was a major consider-

ation. The new show model today is a location that is convenient to car travel, has easy access to interstates, is a half-day's drive or less from major population centers and, most importantly, is a venue that would encourage socializing and interaction between show guests and exhibitors.



Cory Crowell, of W. R. Case & Sons, didn't have far to travel. The company's sales office is in Knoxville.



Mark Strauss, of Knifeology.com, deals in quality handmade knives in the aftermarket.



A mainstay at countless shows across the country and an exhibitor who has never missed an SOS show, R.W. Wilson is both a knifemaker and supplier.

HANDMADE AWARD-WINNERS

- Best Tactical Knife:** Sean Kendrick
- Best Art Knife:** Diana Casteel
- Best Handmade Knife:** Steven Rapp
- Best Fixed Blade:** Steven Rapp
- Best Folder:** Gray Taylor
- Rising Star Award:** Mitch Jenkins
- Open Category:** Ed Van Hoy

COLLECTOR AWARD

- Judges Award:**
Brian Hugh, Buck Tactical Knives
- First Place Award:**
Jerry Skelton, Large Antique Italian Display Knife
- First Place Award:**
Gene Merrit, Yellowhorse Knives
- First Place Award:**
Larry Oden, Buck Factory Production Knives
- Best of Show:**
David Clark, Schatt & Morgan vintage knives and catalogs
- Best of Show:**
John Fullen, Marbles

BEST KNIFE OF 2010-2011 AWARDS

- American-made Knife:**
Emerson Knives, for the Roadhouse Model
- Best Overall Knife:**
Bluegrass Cutlery, for a Stag Whittler
- Best Imported Knife:**
Cas Hanwei
- Best Design:**
Kershaw Select Fini

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- Model No.: 01B0027



Few knifemakers can equal the quality of a Walter Brend knife. Walter is shown here with an exquisite fighter.



Steven Rapp, winner of two handmade awards—which was no surprise to anyone who knows his work.



Lisa Sebenick, of the NKCA, and knifemakers John W. Smith and Aaron Fredrick.



The Ernest Emerson drawing is always an aisle-crowding event.



Representing the four winning Best Knife of 2010-2011 awards: Ernest Emerson, of Emerson Knives; Tim Scott, of Bluegrass Cutlery (Winchester); Missy Hillian, of Cas Hanwei; and Carlton Schumacher, of Kershaw knives.



Collectors who displayed their collections were award-winners, too. Left to right: Jerry Skelton, Larry Oden, Brian Hugh, David Clark, John Fullen and Gene Merrit.

The size of the show was not the primary objective.

One venue that was on every criteria list was the Marriott, in Knoxville. In the past, this hotel had been a Hyatt Regency and had hosted some of the best National Knife Collectors Association shows in the late 1970s and early '80s.

The hotel boasted a large ballroom and a huge, open atrium that could host the entire show in the lobby in a host of conversation areas. Unfortunately, the show left Dallas and moved to the Knoxville Marriott.