



Modeler Ken Hicks shows a hand-painted figure created in the image of his great-grandfather.

## Group proves building in scales fun for all ages

By Ben Holcombe  
Associate Editor

Ernest Hemingway said that bullfighters are the only ones who live their lives all the way up.

Members of the Cumming-based Georgia Mountain Modelers club may disagree. To a point. Or a degree. Or a scale.

At 75, Ken Hicks is the club's oldest member, but oldest by only a year. Hicks, whose primary interest is working with small military figures, just might argue that model builders are the only ones who live their lives all the way down.

"Here's your starting line," he said. "What does a boy 14 and a man 75 have in common? That's a big age difference. They both model."

The "boy 14" is Garrett

Arnold, a student at Piney Grove Middle School. In a recent competition, Arnold won a blue ribbon for his SR-71 Blackbird airplane model.

"I just like planes a lot," he said.

He must. He's now at work on a B-17 Flying Fortress replica.

Club members also won big at the recent Atlanta Military Figure Society Show & Contest, claiming a total of 16 awards.

"You're talking a group of talent here that just can't be beat," said club president Keith Pruitt, a Cumming chiropractor.

The club has around 20 members and meets monthly at Hobbytown USA in Lakeland Plaza. At the February meeting held last week, Pruitt joked about the secret to their recent success: "You never go to a show without

a tube of Superglue in your pocket."

But he and others know there's so much more than glue that holds everything together.

"Most of us, when we're working on a model, we're researching," he said. "I think that's com-

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Above, Robin Arnold looks at a plane frame built by her son, Garrett, a junior member of the Georgia Mountain Modeler during the group's meeting Tuesday. Left, this miniature 1939 Chevy race car display, created by Tommy Logan, comes complete with scrapes on the doors and weeds by the hood. The weeds are made from cat hair.

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mon to all of us, something where we have a personal interest.”

Member Perry Downen could hardly agree more.

“One of the things about building this stuff is you get to learn about the history,” he said.

Downen started building model airplanes as a boy and “had a whole string of them” stretched across his bedroom. Today, he still builds warplanes, as well as model cars. He showed off a near-completed blue Shelby Cobra replica at last week’s meeting.

Also, Downen is one of the builders involved in a team project to construct a World War II diorama for the Currahee Military Museum in Toccoa.

“We’re a bunch of kids who never grew up,” said Charlie Wolski, who at 74 is the club’s second-oldest member.

At last week’s meeting, Wolski showed his in-progress wooden replica of a sailboat used by Canadian-American maritime hero Jonathan Slocum, the first man to sail single-handedly around the world.

Wolski has been working on the model for about six months and said, smiling, “I want to get this thing done before I get *too*, too old.”

While some of the modelers prefer building historical planes and figures, the club’s president likes to recreate a bit of his youth. Pruitt built a 1/24-scale replica of his dream car, a 1970 Ford Torino Cobra, something he said he might never own in full scale.

“Even the spark plug wires are in correct firing order,” he said.

Pruitt also constructed a highly detailed 1/48-scale model of the Millennium Falcon spaceship featured in the “Star Wars” films.

Pruitt said he “pulled out the old VHS tapes” and watched them over and over and over, just to get the details right.

“And it actually has Han Solo and Chewbacca in the



Photos/Jim Dean

Charlie Wolski looks at some of the miniature aircraft on display during a recent meeting of the Georgia Mountain Modelers at Hobbytown.

### Georgia Mountain Modelers

Meets the last Tuesday of every month at Hobbytown USA in Lakeland Plaza in Cumming.

Visit the club’s Web site at [www.mountain-modelers.com](http://www.mountain-modelers.com).

cockpit,” he said. “If you get down there and look at it, you can see them.”

The club, founded in 2005, hopes to also attract more of the post-“Star Wars” younger crowd.

Though not an “official” member, Ashley Elzey, granddaughter of Hicks, claimed a silver medal at the recent Atlanta show for her “Toy Soldiers Madras Calvary” display of British Indian army figures.

While model building may seem like a boy’s world, Elzey

said, “They made me feel at home.”

The club’s youngest member has also helped his mother feel at home making models. Robin Arnold is a Silver City Elementary School kindergarten teacher.

After Arnold’s son, Garrett, became interested in building, mom caught the bug. She likes helicopters.

“It gives me something to do with my son,” she said.

“It has turned out to be a great hobby for him because he gets to interact with guys who are older and they are teaching him history,” she said. “It gives him something to do, something to look forward to. It gives him a purpose.”

In fact, Pruitt said the club is considering the foundation of a junior wing of the Georgia Mountain Modelers.

“One of the things about this particular group of people is they are very community-oriented,” he said.

The modelers often show their projects and present pro-

grams for area civic clubs and other organizations. The club is also a chapter of the International Plastic Modelers Society, one of the hobby's official sanctioning bodies.

In its first year of membership, the club was named the 2006 International Plastic Modelers Society Region 3 Chapter of the Year. Region 3 covers Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, the Carolinas and Tennessee.

While club members are serious about building in their various genres and scales, they try to preserve the element of fun.

It works like anything else, explained Arlene Hicks, wife of member Ken Hicks. She doesn't build models, but she likes creating things and joined her husband at the recent modelers meeting.

"I have my own hobbies," she said. "I just kind of piddle with this and that and something else."

Two of her primary projects involve making ribbon angels and "bunny rabbits" out of plastic bottles.

And shared interests works. The couple has a forged a 48-



Mike Lane holds a photo of Ashley Elzey's award-winning miniature display as he talks with her about her project.

year marriage. Their secret: communication and compromise.

"I critique his figures," she

said, smiling, "and I always have."

*E-mail Ben Holcombe at [benholcombe@forsythnews.com](mailto:benholcombe@forsythnews.com).*