

Prince Harry to get pen made from destroyed boardwalk wood



Engraved pen for Gov. Christie was made from the Seaside Heights boardwalk destroyed by superstorm Sandy. / Courtesy of Historic Pen Co.

Written by
Joe Fisher
For the Asbury Park Press



The engraved pen for Prince Henry of Wales (a.k.a. Harry) was made from boardwalk pieces destroyed by superstorm Sandy. / Courtesy of Historic Pen Co.

Prince Harry and Gov. Chris Christie will take home unusual gifts after visiting Seaside Heights today: engraved pens fashioned from the borough's boardwalk ravaged by superstorm Sandy.

The 24-carat gold-plated rhodium writing instruments, made by the Historic Pen Co. of Stafford, were donated by company owner Bob DeMartino. Seaside Heights Mayor William Akers asked DeMartino to craft the pens for the

occasion.

DeMartino has been crafting pens and keepsakes from boardwalk wood recovered from Seaside Heights, Point Pleasant Beach, Atlantic City and Wildwood.

Having gathered what he calls “witness woods” from places like the battleship USS North Carolina, a Gettysburg field hospital, old whiskey kegs, San Quentin State Prison, Shibe Park and Ellis Island, the Stafford resident dabbled with his idea for years before launching the Historic Pen Co. as a full-time venture in 2012.

“What we’re trying to do is preserve some history. These are heirlooms that hopefully will be passed down from generation to generation,” said DeMartino, 56.

A history major in college and a big sports fan, DeMartino developed his business acumen licensing clothing through sports stars and franchises. “Remember the sweaters that (Bill) Parcells and (Mike) Ditka used to wear in the ’80s? I was one of the partners in Cliff Engle Ltd. that made them,” he said.

While promoting the autograph pavilion at the annual National Sports Collectors Convention, DeMartino saw someone selling wooden pens crafted from baseball bats. The concept stuck in his mind.

After moving to Stafford from Toms River, DeMartino’s interest in history drew him to what had been the Cedar Bridge Tavern in Barnegat, site of the last recorded land battle of the American Revolution. The owner of the building gave him some wood, which would be material for his first pens. DeMartino recruited master pen maker John Greco of

Sewell to treat, turn and polish the wood.

DeMartino's boardwalk wood projects started well before Sandy:

"In March 2012, I'm in Wildwood. I'm walking down the boardwalk and there's two maintenance guys pulling up some boards and nailing down new ones. I said to my wife, 'I'll be right back.' She thinks I'm nuts. So I walk over and I say, 'Guys, what are you doing?' They explained they were replacing the boards, doing regular maintenance. I asked them what they do with the old wood, and they pointed to a Dumpster."

Knowing the emotional attachment people have with boardwalks, DeMartino had a vision and reached out to officials from Shore towns. Negotiations to procure wood were moving slowly, but everything changed after Sandy, and wood was easier to procure.

DeMartino donates a portion of his profits to those Shore towns. He's also made donations to fire departments, schools, Sandy relief efforts, health charities and the Tuckerton Seaport and Baymen's Museum.

Depending on the metals used, DeMartino's pens range in price from \$79 to \$3,500. Flat, laser-etched wooden ornaments cost between \$20 and \$25. Magnets retail between \$10 and \$15.

With word of his merchandise spreading, he said business is picking up.

"In the last month, I've had orders from Arizona, Colorado,

Texas, Washington state, Florida, Pennsylvania, Vermont and Connecticut. We have a return customer rate of 67 percent. I just shipped an order to Switzerland. The people there used to spend summers in Seaside Heights,” he said.

“What we want to do is preserve memories. I remember walking the Seaside boardwalk with my family when I was 6 years old. And as a teenager, I remember coming down from Lyndhurst and hanging out at the Chatterbox and other places,” he added.

Other local wood used for merchandise comes from a boat donated by the Tuckerton Seaport and Baymen’s Museum, and from the landmark Shack along the causeway on Route 72 in Stafford. The Shack washed away during Sandy.

More information about DeMartino’s business is available at www.histoicpencompany.com.