

WE HAVE SEEN THE ENEMY

by John Janelli



All too often we have always anticipated straight forward attacks upon our industry from various animal rights activists groups whose names I won't even waste precious space here to mention. Moving through one airport to another during layover flights from New Jersey to Missouri, found me in total disbelief as to the why's and where of the purpose of this trip were. Gone were the days when these cooler September mornings would find me in route to British Columbia, Alaska, or one of the

many western states for a bow hunt and

places where cell phones don't work at all. This time my cell phone was just about velcroed to my hand as I was being updated by NTA President Steve Wolk and NTA member Barb Duvall with regards to a city council meeting. The open meeting was being conducted to hear the concerns against taxidermists working out of their homes in St. Charles County, MO. I used to think I was well versed by my mentor and close friend John Jackson of Conservation Force when it came to addressing issues like this. This time it was different for me and for everyone concerned. You see, we all saw 'the enemy' that day on September 13th, 2010... and it was one of our own—another professional taxidermist. Making ridiculous claims such as all taxidermists work with flammable, combustible, poisonous, toxic, corrosive, highly dangerous chemicals and elements, were just one of the many completely refutable assaults launched upon our profession, intended to keep us from performing our art within our home properties as in garages, basements, sheds or additions.

After speaking at length with our Executive Director Greg Crain about the logistics of traveling to the meeting, he made no bones about the NTA being on hand for that initial meeting doing what we do best, defending taxidermy from all enemies and I guess now you can say, foreign or domestic. Listening to the Plaintiff state his case against part time taxidermists whether professional or not seared me to the core. The incredible thing was that the Plaintiff was not alone in his mission to eradicate potential competition in and around his area of business. Be that as it may, he was still a brother taxidermist or was I the only person who felt that way? If the tragic story of 'Cain and Able' held any significance to history at all, surely this sort of thing is not new to the human condition. Therefore it became imperative that not only did the NTA need to defend the part time and/or home based Missouri taxidermists, we needed to find a positive common ground that still linked one taxidermist to another. While Steve and Barb

presented some of the most educational information in a nothing less than eloquent style to the zoning council that night, I spent time with the Plaintiff outside the court room. Clearly he seemed as friendly as if we had met in an NTA competition room. His frustrations at the influx of so many 'unregulated taxidermists' seemed to know no subtleties. Coupled by his intense desire to be heard and recognized as an authority in the industry, the Plaintiff was informed by yours truly of the times when our industry did in fact have set business standards in its sights but only during that period the mindset was just the opposite and coming from the now opposing side of the arguments. For those of you who may not remember, it was world renowned master taxidermist, sculptor, author and innovator Joe Kish back in the 70's who tried vehemently to put our industry on a course of both technical and ethical standards. It was received in a most negative response by some of the most luminary of leaders our industry ever had.

Even the legendary icon Coloman Jonas could not have said it better when he wrote back in 1958: "Let your shop be indicative of the kind of work you do – clean, artistic and thorough. Use good tools and materials. Display good examples of your work – the kind that you do for your customer. Maintain the respect of the public and the trade! If you follow these simple rules, you must reach the top. And there is plenty of room for all of us at the top!"

Fortunately, the NTA exceeded our share in maintaining a solid defense in protecting the home-based taxidermists in not only St. Charles County but in Jefferson County, Missouri as well. It is the fifth time in two years that we have been there for our industry in many different circumstances. What counties in other states that are next remain unforeseen, yet apparently are soon to become a reality? For we have indeed seen the enemy, but it's not the Plaintiff, it is us. Make no mistake that more than ever before...we are our brother's keeper.

