



Ralph Kent (Imagineering & Attractions)

Inducted 2004

While growing up in New York, Imagineer Ralph Kent fell "hopefully" under the spell of Disney animated motion pictures, particularly "Pinocchio," he said, because he identified with the puppet's sense of awe, wonder, and magic, an attitude Ralph still holds today.

By age 10, he transformed the basement walls of his home into a giant mural of Disney characters ranging from Alice in Wonderland to Cinderella. Fixated on working for Disney, young Ralph decided to send a letter to Walt Disney, receiving a courteous reply.

In 1963, Ralph's dream came true when he arrived at Disneyland as a marketing production artist. One day, Ralph gained the courage to personally ask Walt if he remembered receiving a letter from a kid in Buffalo.

"I had changed my name legally because nobody could pronounce it - Kwiatkowski," Ralph recalled. And "Walt said, 'That was a Polish kid with a long last name.' I said, 'I know; I changed it.' The eyebrow went up and he said, 'Well, why didn't you tell me [sooner]?' I said, 'I was just in awe of you, and still am.'"

Born January 28, 1939, Ralph attended the University of Buffalo Albright Art School. In 1960, he joined the U.S. Army, illustrating military training aids and films.

Upon discharge, Ralph headed to Disney, where he was hired to develop marketing materials for the Jungle Cruise, Enchanted Tiki Room, and more. He worked with fellow Legends Van Arsdale France and Dick Nunis, creators of Disney University, developing training materials for the Company's four attractions featured at the 1964-65 New York World's Fair, including It's A Small World. He also served as art director to Celebrity Sports Center in Denver, which Walt co-owned with celebrities including Art Linkletter and Jack Benny.

In 1965, Ralph designed the first limited-edition Mickey Mouse watch for adults, which Walt presented to 25 of his top executives. A timely invention, word quickly spread about the unique Mickey Mouse time piece and today, more than 100 adult watch designs are manufactured each year.

Ralph arrived in Florida in 1971, to design souvenirs such as license plates, bumper stickers, and more for Walt Disney World. Eight years later, he became Director of Walt Disney Imagineering East, overseeing Florida staff support for EPCOT Center and Tokyo Disneyland.

In 1990, he joined the Disney Design Group as a Corporate Trainer, mentoring new artists and creating an extensive reference collection of character model sheets.

After 41 years dedicated to The Walt Disney Company, he retired in May 2004, and continues to consult on special projects.

He's also enjoying woodworking: "I always wanted to be Geppetto," he said. And so, Ralph Kent continues to make his Disney-inspired dreams come true.

Ralph Kent died in Florida in September 2007.