

# From Flash to Nugget: On Tour With Mike Pung & The Gold Cube

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Pung retired from the Air Force in 1995. "I met my wife in 1994 and married her the following year. You can only be married to one thing at a time, so the Air Force had to go first!" he laughs. During his years in the Air Force, he practiced woodworking as a hobby. Then when he left, he turned it into a business based in Midwest City, Oklahoma.

We have Pung's mom to ultimately thank for the Gold Cube, because she was the one who invited Pung on his very

first prospecting trip to Alaska and Canada in 2007, teaching him how to pan for gold herself. It was during his trip to the gold rush town of Chicken, Alaska—a town named after Alaska's state bird, the ptarmigan, which apparently no one could spell, and instead renamed the town "Chicken"—that Pung got his first flash in the pan. That was on June 20, 2007. Then, a decade later to the day, Pung found his first nugget at the exact same spot where he had got that first flash.

And what better analogy for the past decade of Pung's life, from flash to nugget.

Pung met his business partner, Steve "Red" Wilcox, while researching equipment to take on that first gold panning adventure with his mom. Wilcox had been selling Gold-N-Sand hand pumps on Ebay at the time. Pung checked out Wilcox's product and had some thoughts about how he might improve it, so he called him up, eager to bestow his unsolicited advice. After the Alaska trip, Pung and Wilcox met up to do some prospecting together. They soon realized that they had much in common, both being extremely like-minded and curiously inventive.

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a rough surface, a drain on a rain gutter, could be a diversion plate or a sluice box. We just looked at things differently and, because of that, little unique ideas would come about," says Pung.

The two men began playing with ideas, throwing stuff back and forth. It was in 2009 that they decided there was a problem getting really, really fine gold. The Gold Cube was invented the following year and their relationship escalated from friends to business partners. "Since then, Red and I have been like brothers," tells Pung. "I go to his kids' weddings and we share all of our life events. It's a great partnership when you can be that close to somebody."

Now Pung and Wilcox have 63 inventions on paper (plus even more potential schemes floating around in Pung's brain!), with three products currently on the market. Eventually, all of these designs will be developed into equipment. According to Pung, "I didn't realize I was raised poor, but growing up I had to make all my own toys. I never got over that. As an adult, I still like making my own toys."

While prepping for that original prospecting trip with mom was when Pung first stumbled upon the GPAA. He began watching "Gold Fever" episodes, excitedly sharing them with Wilcox—or "spreading the happiness," as he refers to it. Pung

realized that Oklahoma's GPAA Chapter 21 was located just 5 miles from his house. He ended up joining the club before leaving for Alaska "in case there were some GPAA claims up there that they could get on." Soon enough, the local chapter made him an equipment manager because "he can fix anything." The next time there were elections, Pung became president and has been ever since. Pung relishes in this opportunity to "warp a lot of minds every month."

And now he's got the itch. "It's a constant fever you can't get rid of. You see something move and you wonder, What if that was gold? It could be a tumbleweed, could be a bug or just the air. But anything that moves, you look at it in a different way if you're thinking about gold." And, just like that, Pung's a prospector for life.

To the horror of his "investor guy," Pung liquidated a whole lot of his retirement to put Gold Cube together. He talks of how serendipitous it's all been, developing and getting the company started. And fun, too! "We had a lot of people tell us to fabricate versus doing the molds, but we said no. We wanted to do it right—the way it's supposed to be done from the beginning. We started out the business being the best it can be, which ended up being the right thing to do. Even after my financial adviser quit!"





Prototype Mold

The very first GPAA show that Pung did was in January 2011 in El Paso, Texas. "I was talking with the people down there, who told me that if I donated a couple of Gold Cubes, I wouldn't have to pay for my booth. So I donated two cubes for the major prize giveaway and got my free booth, and showed and showed and showed, talking until I was blue in the face ... and I sold one."

"Oh, crap!" was Pung's initial reaction (and his unofficial catch phrase). So then off he went to Phoenix, where he gave away two more cubes in exchange for the free booth—this time, selling three. Then there was a GPAA officers rendezvous in Congress, Arizona, where Pung sold four cubes. He began to warm up to the routine, gaining confidence and starting to feel optimistic. Then at a GPAA show in Pomona, California, he sold six cubes. "I think we're gonna be okay," Pung had confided in Red. As it turns out, he was right.

From then on out, Pung has done every single show for the last seven years. In Charlotte, North Carolina, in 2012, the GPAA asked Pung to do a lecture about fine gold recovery. "Thirty minutes was what they told me the day before, then it ended up being a full hour! Okay... I can talk for an hour," tells Pung. "Ever since that show, I've lectured at every show, all across the country. Wherever the GPAA goes, I go. And I'm

humble to the fact that I know what I'm talking about and that I'm fun to listen to. I just enjoy helping people so much."

"The people are my gold nuggets, and I find them all the time—since I rarely find any real gold!" -Mike Pung

Pung loves talking to people and helping them with all situations. He delights in how "changing one little thing causes people's success rate to go up." He's a natural instructor, having spent his last years in the Air Force as a teacher. During that time, he would tell his students that they needed to teach him something in order to graduate, challenging them to do more than just the minimum required of them. And that's a big part of what makes Pung such a competent and charismatic teacher: the fact that he is always willing to learn from everybody. He's constantly paying attention. He's a self-proclaimed "student of the world." While Pung never earned a college degree, he's a real do-er. "I honor the people who are wise in their ways, just as much as I honor the people who made the effort to get a diploma. Everyone has their path in life, and if you're brave enough to stick to it, I respect that."

In regard to lecturing at the GPAA shows, Pung says, "I love seeing the light bulb come on, those ah-ha! moments. I love helping people to become more successful. I love getting calls back after the shows from people telling me, 'You won't





even believe the gold I'm finding now!' From the greenhorn kids to the 90-year-olds, they'll come up to me after my lecture to tell me they learned something — whether or not they thought that was possible. And that's the greatest compliment they could've paid me."

Pung wants to learn all of the things that are out there: about the process, the motion, the way things happen. "I pay attention to everything. There's something to be learned from the discoveries in minds of young kids. Learning brings something to life, enriches situations, enhances the process. Even if it seems insignificant, these things can create a spark, some cool direction for something else. If we pay attention to that stuff, those are the types of things that may change the way to use a shovel—or it may change the way you run an entire country."

Now Pung spends most of his time on the road, sharing his homegrown knowledge with the masses. "I'm just this poor kid from Michigan. But people come out to the shows to meet me and to see the Gold Cube. That makes me feel weird, but humble." It's a symbiotic relationship: the Gold & Treasure Shows give Pung the platform to teach and learn, while also promoting his products and business, and he is helping the GPAA shows to be more successful, drawing a crowd of enthusiastic prospectors and hobbyists and helping them to be the best versions of themselves. "I get put on the GPAA lecture

circuit, and people come in and there are no empty seats. It's a full house every time. They want to hear me, which is cool. And I have fun, telling stories and anecdotes."

While Pung is undeniably personable and interesting, his lectures are so great in part because he has a knack for making any subject easy to understand. And when he compares fine gold to "glitter from a unicorn fart," it's always a crowd pleaser. He likes to make his lectures more fun, "so they actually pay attention." By using "silly little stuff," he makes people really think about the concepts he's discussing. For example, Pung asks, "What does an ounce of gold look like?" He breaks it down for us in a way that anyone who's never seen an ounce of gold would get. "Picture this," he says, "When you go to a restaurant, you've got your little sugar packets for your coffee. One sugar packet of gold is worth \$1,325. That's just one teaspoon, a single sugar packet. That equals one ounce of placer gold."

Pung's uncanny ability to help people visualize concepts no doubt helps in their success rate, and ultimately, in their yield. "That's what I do for both the GPAA members and the Gold & Treasure Show attendees. I'm there to help people succeed. I want them to get all the gold that they can."

*Allison Cohn is a freelance writer based in Colorado*