

**IS THAT A PERSON
OR A STATUE?**



RAY COLLINS

Is that a statue or a real person?

If you've been around downtown Sarasota, you may have seen it. A life-like statue drawing curious stares—and occasional scares for those who don't realize the statue is real.

Say 'hello' to Joe Abel, 59, a retired delivery driver from Baltimore who has lived in Sarasota for more than 25 years. He's been pursuing this unique hobby for a couple years. He's gotten nationwide attention several times on ESPN and other sports networks.

How did you get interested in being the Stand Still Man? I used to go to downtown Sarasota every Halloween for the block party. I had the same costume for 3 years and wanted to do something different, so I did the living statue. I was really just out to have fun, but people were coming back to me asking where do they put the tip? I'm amazed at the amount of people that think I'm really a statue!

Where did you first get the idea? I saw it in Mexico 20 years ago.

How long does it take to prepare? It takes me about an hour to get ready. I do 8 different statues and the camouflage one takes closer to 2 hours.

How long does it take to get the make-up off? It takes a good 15 minutes in the shower. I use silver or gold colored hair spray and also colored contacts for my eyes.

How many days a week? Usually 3-4 days—but if I don't make much money, I'll go out a fifth day. I usually work for 3-4 hours.

Are you making much money doing this? I've made as much as \$500 for a few hours work—and I've made next to nothing. Depends on where I go and if people are in a tipping mood. (Laughs.)

What's your biggest pet peeve on the job? Dealing with drunks, aggressive homeless people or people who take pictures and don't tip.

Do you ask for a tip up front to reduce the chance of a misunderstanding afterwards? No I have a big tip jar out with a sign that says "Please tip for a pic."

Pretty clear. How do you decide when to come out of character and respond? It's really case by case. It depends if they are being nice to me. If they are being idiots I just ignore them and stay still. If they are little kids, I'll come out of character and talk to them. I usually give them a fist bump or high-five.

What's the trick to staying still? The trick is not having to go to the bathroom! (Laughs.) Just focus on something and let your mind just stay focused on that one thing. Kind of like meditation

Why do you like doing it? I love meeting new people and seeing everyone smile and laugh after being scared because they think I'm a real statue. It can be relaxing.

Where else have you "performed?" Events, conventions, ball games. This year I'm booked to work every spring training game for the Detroit Tigers as well as two for the New York Mets, one for the Baltimore Orioles and regular season opening day for the Miami Marlins. Last year, I was a gold hockey player statue at the Florida Everblades game in Ft. Myers.

Any long-term goals with this? I'd like to get hired by a major league baseball team for a whole season. I've been talking to a guy in Detroit who runs the 'fan experiences' for the Tigers and the Red Wings. We'll see.

To book Joe for an event, write StandStillEntertainment2022@gmail.com.

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