

Watauga Arts Council
Weekly column for *The Watauga Democrat*

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On several hot days last summer I took out the time to leave my office and drive over to the neighboring Ashe Arts Center. There I met for several hours at a time with my good friends and colleagues, Jane Lonon (Executive Director of the Ashe County Arts Council), Cathy McKenzie (Executive Director of the Cultural Arts Council of Wilkes), and Genia George (Executive Director of the Alleghany Arts Council). While these were a great opportunity to share some time together, they were also business meetings from which came a lot of good things for at least ten deserving people from our four communities.

We four Arts Council directors have worked as a four-woman team for the last ten years to implement a grants program to help the artists who reside in our four-county region. Each year our Arts Councils contribute the same amount of money to a joint fund. Then the North Carolina Arts Council (NCAC) matches all or part of that with state funds. That combined pool of money is then used to implement the Northwest Regional Artist Project Grant Program.

While there are similar programs all through North Carolina, our project is uniquely our own and is tailored by the four of us to meet the needs of our western North Carolina artists. Over the years we've tweaked and refined the project, keeping some of our original ideas and discarding others. The NCAC has been a constant advisor to us and even frequently sends one of their representatives to participate in our annual panel meetings.

The grants process is a bit more involved than most of our grants programs....artists from the four-county region are given an opportunity to apply in August of each year for grants which will help them further their careers and artistic skills in tangible ways. The completed applications are each referred to an expert in their particular art form (we call them a judge) who reviews the application and completes a form evaluating the artist's artistic skills and the project they're proposing. The judge also makes recommendations as to whether the project should be funded and to what degree.

The judges' comments and evaluation are then attached to the application and these are put into notebooks along with applications from other artists. The notebooks are then given to three representatives from each of the four counties. These twelve panelists spend an entire day reviewing the applications, the judges' comments, and samples of the work of the artists before determining through a weighted point system which artists will receive this year's awards. The county in which the artist resides is not a consideration at all (beyond the

fact that the artist must live within one of the four partnering counties) but it's certainly nice to be able to say that Watauga County's artists always make us very proud.

This year's winning artists are:

- Jeff Martin (Watauga County) was awarded \$1,000 to help him purchase a trailer to transport his pottery around the country to sell it at trade shows.
- Kim Hadley (Ashe County) will use her \$725 grant to purchase a camera.
- Cheryl Roberts (Ashe County) who will use her \$950 award to attend a workshop to further her skills in traditional rug-hooking.
- Deborah Jean Sheets (Watauga County) is planning to use her \$1,000 award to help defray the costs of recording and marketing her new CD featuring the traditional music for which she's well-known.
- Pat Morrison (Ashe County) plans to purchase a camera and software with her \$1,000 grant.
- Leigh Ann Henion (Watauga County) is also purchasing an Icon Digital camera to help with her documentary photography projects.
- Pac McLaurin (Watauga County) is also working on a documentary and will use his \$875 grant toward photography supplies.
- Chelsy Miller (Wilkes County) is a potter who will soon be using a new slab roller and griffin grip to help her create her wonderful pottery in her home studio.
- Janet Brashear (Ashe County) is a printmaker who needed to purchase track lighting and a drying/storage rack for her studio. Her \$550 grant award will make that possible.
- Catherine Altice (Ashe County) also needed a camera to help her in career as a jewelry artist and photographer. She was awarded \$750.

We are so proud to present the 2007-2008 award-winning artists and to say with great confidence that our four arts councils have been able, through this program, to help them become better and more self-sustaining artists. If you would like more information on this program, please visit our website at www.watauga-arts.org or contact our office.



This year's Regional Artist Project Grant Winners for 2007-2008 are (left to right) Chelsy Miller (Wilkes County), Pat Morrison (Ashe County), Kim Hadley (Ashe County), Pac McLaurin (Watauga County), Leigh Ann Henion (Watauga County), Jeff Martin (Watauga County), Catherine Altice (Ashe County), Janet Brashear (Ashe County), Deborah Jean Sheets (Watauga County). Not pictured is Cheryl Roberts (Ashe County).

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