

Penland News

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Joe Bova, chair of Penland's board of trustees, is enjoying life these days. This year, he's back to making ceramic sculpture on a regular basis, and after seven years as director of Ohio University's school of art, he's happy to say that he's just a teacher again.

Joe taught drawing and ceramics at Louisiana State University for twenty years, before he moved from Baton Rouge to Athens, Ohio. He enjoyed his years in the administrator's role, but the demands of running an art department didn't leave him any studio time, and he didn't get much reading done. "I started reading a lot of poetry because it was the only thing I could finish," he laughed.

Dana Moore



Joe Bova working on a "Bovingle" collaboration.

He did get a little work made, however, thanks to an old friend. In the summer of 1995, while visiting Penland, he went to the ceramics studio hoping to find Cynthia Bringle, who was teaching at the time. Cynthia wasn't there, but a recently thrown jug was sitting on her wheel. Instead of leaving a note, Joe pinched a face into the pot; he knew this would get her attention. A little while later she walked up to him and said sternly, "I've been looking for you." Then she added, "We've got to make some more of these."

They worked together after that session and have met at her studio from time to time since. Cynthia throws the vessels, and Joe adds a face, an animal, or some other figurative element, and then she finishes the piece. Not only did it get Joe into the studio, but the collaboration resulted in a successful show at Asheville's Blue Spiral Gallery this spring.

Joe has taught at Penland every few years since 1983, and he can recite a long list of Penland instructors who are former students of his. That connection plus his administrative experience made him a natural for the Penland board.

As a board member he feels that the priority for Penland is very clear: "My greatest concern is the infrastructure; our activities keep outgrowing the physical support. I think Jean [McLaughlin] is right on track with her interest in the facility and her proposal for a campus master plan that will guide future developments. I also have a strong interest in the program, but there's not much that needs to be done there: enrollment is high, we have many returning students, a good balance of classes, and excellent instructors."

Joe's tenure as board chair included a year-long transition between directors, and he's very positive about that process. "Donna Jean [Dreyer] did an amazing job as interim director and she made it possible for Jean to come into a very supportive atmosphere. It was really a matter of circumstance that they overlapped for so long—Jean couldn't begin very soon after she was appointed and Donna Jean was willing to stay longer than she had hoped to. But this gave them a lot of time to consult with each other, and it worked so well that I wish we could say that we planned it that way." —Robin Dreyer



Dana Moore

SAVE THE DYE SHED!

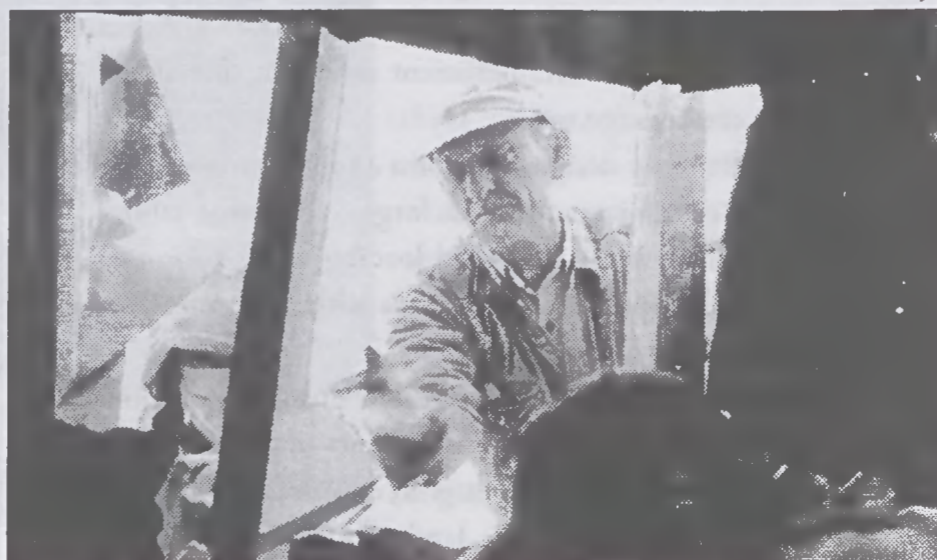
Many Penland students have spent a happy hour or two on the porch of the Dye Shed, just hanging out or in deep conversation about artistic concepts or enjoying the sunset and an opportunity for peaceful contemplation. But how many have wondered about the building's history?

The oldest building on the Penland campus, it was originally built as a log barn in the 1840s. It was converted into a pottery studio in 1928, and a metal shop was added to the west side in 1929. Metals moved out in 1938 and pottery exited in 1949. Unfired pottery and lampshades were made in the building for a time, and it was converted to photography and darkroom use in 1952. Its final conversion came in the early 1960s when it was used for dyeing textiles with native plants (hence the name). It was used in this capacity into the 1980s.

Disuse for many years has allowed the building to fall into a state of decay and instability (which hasn't kept students from occasionally claiming it as a gallery space). With the school's cooperation and blessing, the local community of craftspersons has organized to rescue this historic building. The effort will include fundraising and volunteer labor to perform needed repairs consistent with the original style and spirit of the building. We look forward to this project—truly a labor of love.

Contributions of any size and kind are most welcome and handsome T-shirts and tote bags proclaiming our bannered motto—Save the Dye Shed—are available at the school, at Jane Peiser's studio, and at Barking Spider Pottery. The school will be contributing to this effort with support services and in other ways, but all funds for the rescue effort will be raised by the community. Donations can be sent to Penland School marked *Dye Shed* and they will be placed in a restricted fund for this project. Won't you help restore this icon of Penland's past and its future?

—Jon Ellenbogen



Robin Dreyer

Tracy Dotson passing chimney bricks through the roof of the kiln shed.

THE PENLAND EXPERIENCE

As part of our ongoing series of Penland stories told through the eyes of students, we are delighted to publish part of a letter from Martha Morrill who took a basketmaking class with Ferne Jacobs some years ago. Martha, who lives in Miami, was responding to our annual appeal and her letter accompanied a generous donation.

Recently, a letter came from your office which told of improvements at Penland that will surely give everyone a spiritual and physical lift. The plans for the future sound impressive. However, it is not the physical plant that I remember with affection: it is the welcoming, cheery helpfulness. It is the pleasure of craftsmanly accomplishment and the beauty and surprise of the work regardless of the medium.

The intervening years since that truly wondrous summer session with Ferne Jacobs have brought several changes in my life—some of which arrived in 1992 through Hurricane Andrew. The most significant change came with my retirement in 1996 from teaching composition and literature at Miami-Dade Community College.

Friends encouraged me to become a student of Donna Sperow, who teaches wheelthrowing at the Ceramic League of Miami. The long process of learning how to center and throw a pot began as a distraction from what happened to the house and yard during the hurricane. But during that Penland time, subtle mental shifts had happened: meeting Warren MacKenzie and watching his group fashioning pots; at the session's end, buying glass pitchers at the student sale; receiving a little pitcher from Jill Beech; then, much later, finding in my mail box a package from McKenzie Smith, who was at Archie Bray in Montana. In the box nestled one of his handsome large coffee cups. These gifts prepared me for the experience with Donna, and learning the potter's way of creating baskets has been filling the empty spaces opened by the disappearance of my college teaching schedule.

When Donna's son, Michael Sperow attended a recent summer session, in a special way he had become my surrogate, learning what would have pleased my younger self. After high school graduation and his father's death, Michael had been a wanderer. Yet, during that summer session at Penland, he metamorphosed into a confirmed student. Returning to Miami, he enrolled at Miami-Dade Community College.

This month he has completed his courses and has been accepted at Florida State University, in the School of Fine Arts, with a scholarship. Through the experience at Penland, he discovered himself and what means the most to him. Penland, the crucible, served as catalyst. Michael's word for the experience: "Fantastic."

So it is time for me to send Penland a gift. May the money support the great and good hopes of all the students.

Sincerely yours, Martha Morrill



In the major improvements department, the Penland clay studio has a new salt kiln, thanks to Tracy Dotson and the members of his spring kiln-building workshop. Six lucky potters spent a week discussing kiln design and theory and working very hard to put up the new kiln and chimney. Tracy, who lives just down the road, has built over two-hundred kilns during his thirty-five years as a studio potter, kiln builder, and perpetual student. Tracy and most of the workshop students returned a couple weeks later for the test firing. It was beautiful.