

KENTUCKY CRAFT HISTORY AND EDUCATION ASSOCIATION, INC.

Interview with Craig Dial
Interviewer is Mary Reed
April 19th, 2017

() This symbol refers to an inaudible word or phrase.

. . . This symbol refers to an interruption to the speaker

Dial:

We can get through some of the stuff and then we'll...

Reed:

Okay. So are we ready?

Camera Man:

Yep. We're rolling.

Reed:

Okay. Hi, my name is Mary Reed and I'm interviewing Craig Dial at Red Bird Mission crafts in Beverly, Kentucky. Today is Wednesday, April 19th, 2017. This interview is part of the Kentucky Craft History and Education Association's mission to interview Kentucky craft luminaries and organizations in order to save their stories. Hi, Craig, tell us a little bit about yourself and your family, where you're from, your background.

Dial:

I grew up in Kansas and my dad was a Methodist minister and then a United Methodist minister. And I had attended a church in Topeka that was part of the Evangelical United Brethren, which is the religious organization that started Red Bird Mission. And so I was aware of Red Bird Mission back then. And then I was working with a company called Scaggs Alpha Beta, which was a super drug store combination grocery store. And I got moved to Salt Lake. And then when I was in Salt Lake, I felt this need to find something more in my life. And I wasn't sure what it was. And somewhere along the line, (inaudible) to come to Red Bird. And I had been contacted by a representative who said they were looking at trying to develop a little more professional skills because they were growing so much, they needed some skills in marketing and everything to take over these kinds of systems.

Dial:

So I was one of the first hire that was hired specifically for that training. So I came to Red Bird in August of '87 and walked into the craft store and said, "Oh wow, this is retail. I can do that." And I found out I couldn't. I found out that craft marketing was a very difficult business for people. It was hard to find out and I had to determine what was the real purpose of the system? Why do we have the craft store? And I had talked to some people, but I couldn't find the heart of it. And then Chet and Martha Cramer, who had started the original craft program back in '64, they came to spend time with us. And while they spent time with us, I began to understand what the purpose was. And so what we did differently is the primary purpose of the craft program was to develop its revenue for people who lived in the mountains. It's hard to develop revenue in the mountains and people don't get down in here very often. So we had to begin to figure out how do we get crafts out to people? And then how do we find ways to help them make more money? So we developed a basic marketing strategy that took us about five years, which started first... got that background noise. Don't you? That's a diesel right there.

Dial:

They're going to come and wash clothes. Okay. About just to go ahead. Yeah. Okay. We decided to develop a marketing strategy that was built around economic opportunities and how do we help people make more money and where do we go to market those things? Now it would be really nice if I could tell you they all were accomplished at the same time. We spent

time with the Kentucky Craft Market, with the Kentucky Guild of Arts and Crafts, and also with the Southern Highland Handcraft Guild. But we discovered that the return on the amount of time we invested in it was not coming back at a very high rate. And in most of these situations, they were juried artists and they were less than 17% of the number of craftspeople we had in our organization. So I had to find a marketing strategy that would include everybody.

Dial:

And we had met some people from Morris Fork Crafts at a craft show. We did at the church in Berea, at the community church, their congregational church, and the, they said they went to Presbyterian churches and sold crafts. And I said, that might be something we want to do, but what you got to have the way to put it together, how do you do displays? And so we spent a year working through that process of working with churches and it, it became so successful that we no longer needed to spend the time or the money for the Kentucky Craft Market or the Kentucky Guild of Arts and Crafts or the Southern Highland Handcraft Guild. We had enough to do that. I didn't need to put those in the system.

Reed:

Tell me about Red Bird Mission crafts. What is it, how does it work?

Dial:

Well, first of all, almost everything in here is purchased by Red Bird Mission. It's by and when we originally came here, we were actually writing out checks when they first came and then we had to fill out invoices and later on, as we became a little more accomplished and then the business office would put out the checks and one of the things we were working on and I want to stop now, they're going to come in for quarters.

Reed:

Tell me about Red Bird Mission crafts and how it got started and its purpose and helps the crafter.

Dial:

What they were looking for was some method whereby they could generate revenue for people, income. Talking specifically about secondary income, added income to buy some of the things that they couldn't produce themselves. In their gardens and whatever they did. And so the idea was to help teach people how to make crafts. And then the other thing was to find ways to market it. And they had a little craft store under the old hospital, and that's where they first started. They'd make some of the crafts on grounds and then they would sell it the little craft store there. And that was the original start, but it was limited by the number of people that visited. And then even back then, the roads were really hard to get back in here on. So it wasn't nearly as easy to drive in here as it was before. So they were greatly limited on the amount of money that could be made from it because their sales system, their marketing system was right there.

Dial:

Then a church up in Wilmington up in Maryland had developed a craft shop and they put crafts up there and they begin to see that working. So the idea they were thinking of was how do we

create more little craft shops in other churches? When I came and looked at that marketing system, the primary problem I saw was there was a great deal of inventory locked in, or the location that was not producing the sales that would match what you needed. So you had this whole group of inventory. It looked like somewhere around \$10,000 worth of inventory and their sales were 23 to \$30 a week. So you just simply weren't getting returned for what you did to it. So there began to be some discussion on how we could change that. But as we developed the concept of economic development, that's when the marketing system had defined a way to let everybody be represented so we could sell everybody's crafts.

Dial:

And so jurying greatly limited who could qualify for marketing system. So we just chose to step away from that and looked at just skill, including how well they paint ceramics, you know, and do those kinds of things. And we would sell ceramics and we would direct them towards ceramics. They have other sales when people created toys, we would work with them on how to create a way to do more mass production, how to do it cheaper. Or in this case, we moved them from pine to hardwoods, which means we could almost triple the price because people were buying hard, Kentucky hardwoods in these toys, and they acquired a little more work. But when you trim hardwood, you can make it smoother than you can pine. So there was a lot of things that it corrected for itself. And so that's what generator we're trying to do.

Dial:

How do we help people make more money? And so we, we created a plan where the question first was, what person do we have now? My terminology is just used for this operation, and it's not meant to cast any aspersions to anybody, but it was the way we decided we had people who were making secondary income from crafts, and we called them craftspeople. Then we had craftspeople who were making primary income. This was their major income. And, and how do we teach them how to make more money? And then we had artists who were doing single individual form stuff. And so they were handled totally different. And, and we also put in that some of our furniture making because furniture making took longer. And so there was more an art form. They'd make one chair at a time. And so we begin to look at them separately.

Dial:

And the artists we treated differently because their income varied on how the product sold. And if they had high price, enough items then, and only then would we do consignment sales. Now, when we did a consignment sale, we would have them bring in an article. We would look at it and say, what do you need out of this? Well, the first thing I discovered is people didn't know how much money they had in it. So in the middle of everything, we begin charting the cost to create the product. And that was a gruesome time for me because people would make things and do a bit and a piece and another bit, another piece till they got done. And I had to get them convinced, I needed to know how much time they put into it. The other thing was, if they begin to develop a production level, those exceeding their raw materials, they'd better build in the cost to purchase these materials because otherwise then the cost would suddenly jump and they would have one item priced at one because they used materials.

Dial:

They found other items that cost more because they purchased the materials. So we identified that if you could find the product, you can make a bonus, but we kept the price structure had. If you had to purchase the materials to make it. Now, that's not true with basket materials or with a bark that you put in chairs or anything else that kind of stuff is you got to get it as it is, find it

where it is. And sometimes bark is not as good as it is other years, depending on what the rain has been like with the groceries and black, whether the frost came in too early, all those things make a difference in how your product comes out. So you have to be pay attention to the cost factor of that product. So when people make the big chairs that we see, or the, or the rocking chairs, we actually tell them to give us a price that we can sell it for.

Dial:

And it has to be something that we can sell it for. And then what we do is we take 10% off for the handling, because since they're giving us that much inventory to take a chance with, it's just like that other store, we couldn't afford to give them all that inventory. We just have a processing chart and that's all we do. Now, I think that's maybe 5% of our inventory, but when you're selling an overall craft store, you have to have some indigenous high dollar items, just like dulcimers, there's bowls back there that are \$700 a piece, but they're worth \$700 a piece. So you've got to have those, but you can't afford to spend that much money on inventory. So you do it on consignment.

Reed:

Okay. So did you train the artists or the crafters to do the work?

Dial:

No. I discovered that that was hard to do because you can't have desire to make money, that'll make you an artist or a craftsperson. You have to like doing it. And so part of our study was to figure out what did they like doing when someone would come in here with little things that they made, we would tell them, bring in everything that you've made, not just what's selling today, bring us everything so we can see what did you like doing? Because we can discover that sometimes you have something you like making, but no one sold it. You couldn't sell it, so you quit making it. Well, that's because you had a small marketing area, like up and down, Middle Fork was all the place you sold it. So there were the only ones that ever saw it. So we're taking it other places.

Dial:

So let's see what all you like making. And the thing that was interesting was once you started working with them, what did they like making? Then you got into where their heart was. And when you got into their heart, there was a guy that came in here. He was making ornaments out of pine, Christmas ornaments, and his daughter would paint them. And they were able to make money on that. And one day I said, what do you really love doing? Because everybody in the United States knows how to paint ornaments made out of pine. What do you like to do? He says, I love to do scroll saw. I said, okay. So what have you done that scroll saw? So he came back and a week later, he brought me some ornaments that he'd done in scroll saw and he brought some bigger items. And I looked at them and said, well, that's really pretty cool.

Dial:

How do you do all this? And he told me how he individually did it. Well, he did ornaments that were about this thick, and he'd do one at a time. So I called around to some of my friends in Kentucky. And they said, no, no, no. When you want to do that kind of stuff, you stack them all and put tape around the piece of wood. And then you drill holes where the opening is. And you just put the saw blade in and saw at that hole. And you're doing six ornaments at a time. So he started doing six ornaments at a time. Well, all of a sudden he was in production and he could

make a lot more money because now the price came down because the amount of labor he put in it, and he was using a kind of wood that wouldn't splinter very bad.

Dial:

So it didn't have to be cleaned up very much. And so he moved in production. Now, you know, there's a wall over here that has nothing but his ornaments on it, but then there's another wall that has a Noah's ark on it that's cut out a Walnut and it has a dove on each end. And it, it has all these animals scroll sawed into it. And he created Christmas pictures and all kinds of stuff. And once you tell a craftsperson, what can be possible and talk about a crucial issue called quality control. In other words, you make sure you spend that time to make sure it really looks good. I have never had a craftsperson who was either in it, just for the hobby or in it because they needed the revenues. I've never had a craftsperson, not totally astound me at the quantum jump they make, once they understand what we're trying to say about quality and using the right stains and using the right finish and trimming it and cleaning it like it's supposed to be. And all of a sudden you walk through this store and you're awe struck by how they've moved forward into a way of creating a work of art. That to them is just production work, but no one else is doing it. And it's so unique and so beautiful and so special. And the main marketing tool we have is when someone... I'm out selling crafts and someone picks this up, I can walk over and talk to them about the man that did this, who broke his back on an open face mine, falling off a Caterpillar, trying to get away from a slide and thought he was fully disabled. And now I have this full double garage that he does the sawing in when he feels like it.

Dial:

And when he gets his back hurting and everything else, he quits. And then he goes back and does it again. And he still produces stuff for us. And I don't know how much money it makes. I don't think that's an important to him. It's he's got a life and he feels like he's producing something. That's what all of this is about why this... being a Christian organization, we worry about people's lives. Not only do we want them to create economic... if we want to, but we want them to feel with their heart, that they're being something they're being themselves. They they've identified themselves again. They're no longer left over from a mining accident. They are now a craftsperson. Who's found something they love doing and are creating things that people all over the United States enjoy. And the best thing that can happen, I almost get in tears, is a craftsperson comes in and we have visitors. And we tell when they come and look at it, right at that point in time that craftsperson can sell directly to that person right then, and to have a person who's buying stuff from them, oohing and awing over how beautiful their work is and everything else. I can brag on them all day long. They're used to hearing me say that, but to have someone who's purchasing their crafts and talking about the importance of what that craft means to them is the most uplifting thing I can do for craftspeople.

Reed:

Building self-esteem. Value. Sounds like you were teaching pricing, wholesale, retailing and improving marketing and proving their quality and production process.

Dial:

We had to spend time. They had to understand what it costs to make the item and understand if there were shortcuts, the guy that made the toys was cutting out his own wheels. The problem was he would drill the hole for the axle and put a dowel in it for the axle, well, the dowel matched the hole, which means if you grabbed the wheel and turned it, I don't care how you glued it. It would snap it loose. Well, there's a company and I'm not going to mention the name,

but you can buy the wheels already made, but you can buy the axle that's for it. And when you put it in there, you put glue around it, and then you have to take a wooden mallet and drive that axle into that wheel. And then when you put it on, you put the body on it and you set the next wheel on it.

Dial:

And with a wooden axle and glue with a mallet, you drive it on that. It'll never come off of there because first of all, the woods already got there. The glue, not only glues it, but causes the wood to grow a little bit because of the moisture that's in it. And he can buy those wheels at roughly 10% of the cost. It costs him labor wise to cut out the other wheels and they're already trimmed and everything. And the person who's buying it, all they're looking at is the body made out of hardwood. They don't care about the wheel. And so the end result is we moved him into a higher production level just by having find a source that made it easy for him to do axles and wheels. Pause. Just a minute.

Reed:

What is your service area here?

Dial:

Well, we used to have a service area that was probably about six counties back when we started, and then we had this most wonderful problem. We had created sales so much, we needed more merchandise. So I was trying to find a way to get ahold of more craftspeople. And excuse me, I discovered that we were saying we were marketing for Appalachia crafts artists. So I felt that before I did that, I needed to find a boundary line and believe it or not, the 1951 National Geographic, who had a story about Appalachia, set a boundary line for what was considered Appalachia and included Berea and would go on out into Somerset and those areas past there. But it gave me an area in Southeast Kentucky, the state in the boundary that would allow me to say, these are Appalachia crafts. I mean, who do you pick better than National Geographic to decide what that level's going to be?

Dial:

And so then how do I get to these? And so the Cooperative Extension Agency has training for crafts and does different things. So I begin to contact them. And my first one was in Perry County and for free! Now, they ended up giving me 50 bucks. But anyway, for free, I told him I would give a class on crafts as a business. And then the afternoon have everybody that came, bring me the crafts that they made, all of them. And I sat down with each one of them and I would write out purchase orders and go ahead and buy crafts from them. And I wouldn't take those crafts, but I'd order for them. And then they had to deliver them to us. They couldn't ship them because in the midst of discussing quality control and how you did our thing, I needed to come to this location to look at the crafts we had to understand part of the family they were going to be with. So they had an idea about those things. And so we would talk about how much money do you want to make? How much money are you making? How much is it costing you to make your crafts, raw materials, production methodology, acquisition of marketing sources and everything else to see if we could find a way to help them. So I gave a class on that, and then I had a lot of people afterwards. I spent an hour and a half after the class talking with different questions people had, then I had lunch and then I began to buy crafts and I saw crafts I'd never seen before. I mean, I would go, okay. And then I would say, what else do you do? And they said, well, I didn't bring everything.

Dial:

I said, the specific instructions were to bring everything you've ever made. He says, well, I'm only about 30 minutes from here. I said, why don't you go get them? And when you come back, I'll let you move to the front of the line again. So he would go back. And again, there's that process. What do you like making, what do you enjoy making? What do you like working with? And then you begin the process. And of course, what was fun was to say, look, we'll take 12 of these. We'll take 24 of these. We'll take 12 of these and we'll take 10 of these. And then they would say, well, I have to stop and make all of these. I said, well, how long do you think it'll take you to make them? And they would tell me, and then I'd say, you know, as long as you don't produce the crafts, until someone wants to buy them, you are now in the requirement to meet that purchasers marketing system.

Dial:

In other words, they are in control of your life. If you build an inventory and it could be six, it could be 12, depending on what you sell. If you build the inventory and I order this from you and you go click, click, click, and hand it to me. Now in your own time, you can replenish that inventory. Now, you're in charge of your crafting business. And so that's, I've tried to tell them that building up inventory makes a world of difference in how hard you have to work, because sometimes you got to get the garden in, sometimes you've got to do the canning and you need to be able to stop and do that. If you build an inventory up when you're not doing that stuff, but all you do is put the stuff in the box and ship it out. And when you see you're getting close, you find a way to spend your time to build your inventory back.

Reed:

So what county are we in here?

Dial:

This is the corner of Clay County, Leslie County and Bell County. Right across the road is Leslie County. Down the road, six, well, five and a half miles is Bell County. And that's where the original Red Bird Mission was, was in Bell County. So we are a three county area that we serve that. And we just had to go beyond that. I mean, I've done all the way up to Pikeville to work with them, Bell County I've looked around to find more artists and that process began to diminish when number one, we had a lot of craftspeople and number two, my marketing system started costing me more time and I no longer had that wonderful capability to visit craftspeople. That's one of the tragedies about success I ran into.

Reed:

When did this program start?

Dial:

It originally started, I think, probably in '64 to '68. Karen and I came here in '87 and it was just a little craft store. And we first had to understand, we thought the display could be different. We also had to understand that how do we expand the marketing? One of the things we have a group called work campers that come down here and they used to filter in on Fridays and buy crafts when their project was done. And so we made an effort to develop a specific time that we would open in the evenings just for them. And now on Tuesday we have a program and we have as much as 120 people come in here and do shopping. And we, well, there's no

percentage to mark the difference between casually having to come in here and setting up a specific program for them to buy.

Dial:

And so that really changed how the sales went. Well, once we recognized that we saw churches was a place to go. We found that out from another one and we discovered that churches were a magnificent place to sell, it would also help sell the mission, but we had places where people would buy anything. And so all our crafters could be constantly represented. And when we were in full-blown marketing we had actually two full-time teams and one part-time team that had an eight-foot trailer, covered trailer and a 15 passenger van that had just the two front seats in it. And we hauled them full of crafts and furniture. It took 20 to 24 8-foot tables to set up all of our merchandise. And we would arrive on Friday night and a church people would meet us and help us set everything out on the table.

Dial:

We had sales from nine to two, and then we would go to something and do it like a mission presentation. Then we had Sunday morning church and we sold crafts and then 15, 20 people would be there to help us pick up and pack things back in the boxes and let us put it in the vans and trailers and bring them home. And we were really making good money with that and selling everybody's crafts. The only thing we wouldn't take out on the road where the really fragile crafts that could possibly get damaged if we moved them around too much.

Reed:

Do your artists and craftsmen, are they juried through any type of system?

Dial:

Not that I'm aware of. They market through us.

Reed:

No, I meant do you jury their work or in any formal type of way or?

Dial:

No, because I'll be honest with you, juried crafts add no value. They can talk about it, but the value for juried crafts in a certain marketing area, that's more artist for people who do crafts and they do production methodology that allows more and more of it. You need to find a place where they'll buy those and the people who buy those. If you're selling to... Our toy maker, for instance, sells to a craft shop in Berea and they make... well, and even the Berea College Crafts buys his toys and he sells tons of toys there. And that's all he's got to do. And it doesn't matter that he belongs to any group or anything.

Reed:

So, you as a director do your own personal jury to decide if it's quality enough that you want to represent them?

Dial:

No, our requirement is to find out what they want to make, and then help them reach that quality. Because everybody that comes in here, we need to try to serve one way or the other.

And that's either, change what they're making, because this is more marketable. If that's what they're trying to make money, but it's in their premiere, what they do, or the tools that they have. And then we study quality control. Quality control takes, and this is my own guesstimate, you can't hold it up to anybody, quality control takes less than 11% of your time. And it's worth 50% of your profit value because you can actually raise the price that much. When you see people touch it, you will note that on wood stuff and everything else, you see the customer rubbing their hand across and feeling that they are falling in love. And it has to be soft.

Dial:

Even if it's wood, it has to be soft. It has to be warm. It has to be calling to them. And so you've got to fix something that when you run your hand across it, it doesn't catch on anything that's called quality control. And once you teach people what quality control is, they begin to build it into their manufacturing system or in their production system, which means now quality control is taking less time because they're having to do less correction of errors down the production line. They're solving the problem down here. And after a while, you can move... I mean, we have toys over there, a pull toy \$65 - \$85, and we helped its value by calling it a heritage toy. If you buy it, you will be giving it to your son who will give it to his son because those hardwood toys like that on those big axles wheels and everything else, you can do a war dance on them and not hardly break them.

Dial:

So you've gathered something that you can pass on. And so we talk about what we've got, has a history behind it. And it's something that will be a value to your family. I will tell you in my family, Karen and I have collected crafts and we have taken care of a living will and everything else, because at our age, you need to do that. Both of our kids know that we have to bring them in because both of them, when they were children would go with us on craft shows and they love the crafts. And we have to bring them to the house on an afternoon and let one pick something. And then the other picks, and we're going to put their names in all, because they want these toys or they want these baskets, or they want these turn bowls. And we want to make sure that when the time comes, that we have to get rid of all of this stuff, that they have properly decided what they want.

Dial:

And they have said, yes, that's the way it'll have to be done. And so, I mean, to them, it's important. And it's the same thing. When someone brings something, they come and they have a story, how you came to Redbird and how you work. And sometimes they work in a craftsman's home and the craftsman gives them the item and they come and see us and ask about it. And I can fill out the story because mountain people don't brag on themselves. And so as a result, I brag for them on how good they do this and how hard they work and everything else, because people should know that.

Reed:

Do you furnish the material supplies to your crafters? Help them secure them?

Dial:

No. We teach them where they can get sources of what they want. We help them contact or find out from other people where they buy. You can call someone who buys wood and he can tell you where he gets his wood from. And so we can give them contacts that they can go and buy from. And so, and part of that is we want them to be self-sufficient. We really don't want to

craftsperson totally, depending on us for the income that they make, we would like them to be self-sufficient. We can hope we will be here. But the truth of matter is the history of craft operations in the last few years is getting kind of dismal because the organizations have failed. The marketing structure that they've had set up is failed for whatever reasons, because people are people and, and the, the thing that generated the start for it and the thought of it and, and the, the heart of what they were trying to generate, fell away to economics and value of quality crafts and art forms and everything else. And so you lost the original reason why these craft groups formed. And so they've just kind of fell to the wayside. And I mean, you know, we've had wonderful organizations, one of the oldest craft cooperatives in the state of Kentucky, Kentucky Hills finally folded because of the inability to figure out how to, to recreate their marketing strategy and to have the staffing that would allow them to do that.

Reed:

So the crafts are made in the individual homes and not here in the shop, you're just an outlet for them. Correct?

Dial:

Yes.

Reed:

Are there other ways that you sell the crafts for them, besides just here in the retail area?

Dial:

We have a website that they can people and go to. It's not that good, but it's a place to go and look at. And of course you have to watch what you put on that website, because you can't put a single item on the website because if two people wanted it, then you're going to have a disappointed customer. So you have to find a way to try to stay away from that. And plus, we like having them out here. I, the first time we bought a bowl that we had to retail for \$600, we paid the guy \$400 for it and retailed it for 600. And I took it with me. I remember I was in Kansas and it was \$625. And this guy walks up and he picks the bowl up and he looks at it and puts it under his arm and starts walking around.

Dial:

And I thought, you know, maybe I should go and talk to him. So he doesn't have sticker shock when he gets to the check stand. And I told him, \$625 says, yeah. And he held that in his arm the entire time and bought that \$625 bowl. And I called Rose up and said, we got to buy more of these. We can sell them, but I never thought we could sell on that level because we hadn't, we tried to sell quilts. We could never get what people needed out of quilts. And so that's when we went to that craft group David Appalachia Crafts, because they knew how to sell quilts. And I would send my quilting people up to them, or we would contact each other, the, the gals that were working there and they would take them cause we had some good quilt makers, but I could not get them their money's worth in my operation.

Dial:

People didn't see that as part of what we did, but they could get their 600, \$800 for their quilts through David Appalachia. And so we worked together with David Appalachian. We bought stuff from David Appalachia, too. We did that with other groups whenever possible, bought from them to help them out. And it helped us out. It made me, it was never one of those. We're doing this

just as a favor to you because you're a business and you can't let your heart get in too much. You still have to run as a business. So it's, it's really hard to struggle between those two things,

Reed:

Do you wholesale these products as well?

Dial:

We do. The reason we don't push wholesale markets is because wholesale has a lot lower margin, has much higher cost and it takes a long...We've tried to sell just retail only, but we will sell wholesale. If someone really wants something, we'll set a wholesale price for it. We actually have in the computer program, a wholesale price.

Speaker 3:

Do you purchase from your crafters at wholesale?

Dial:

We help them set their wholesale price depending on how long it took them to make it in the cost and everything else help them set the minimum price. And, and we, as far as I know, were we still looking at \$5 an hour? They should make at least \$5 an hour for their craft.

Reed:

More. (laughs)

Dial:

I know, but I'm saying, that's what we try to work. That's where we start now. Oftentimes we get \$5 and everything else and go, we can get you more. Sometimes we can't. And then we have to say, okay, maybe you need to look at something else. The baskets that we sell, the hand baskets, your experience is to go get the raw materials, takes a tremendous amount of effort. And you can't even put that on the cost of the baskets. You'll never be able to sell it. So you have to put the labor that you put it together and you're ignoring all the labor.

Dial:

You spent gaining the raw materials. And in case of a honeysuckle, you have to boil it and strip it. And then you have to bleach it to get the color you want. So you've got this whole, this labor that you ignore. So what we've done in our operation is we move the profit margin from item to item, depending on how much we can, what we need totally to run the operation. And so you can say that we have some items, we get a 50% markup on some miners. We get a 60% markup on because we can do that. Some items, we get a 30% baskets or 20, so that the craftsperson get more money for the basket. Otherwise we couldn't sell them because it'd be too high priced or they wouldn't get enough money to pay for it. And we cannot in good conscience, help a crafter go broke. That's not our job.

Reed:

Now can you afford to go broke yourself, because then you're not helping the craftsmen.

Dial:

And that's the partnership. The partnership is if you want us to help you, well then you have to let us tell you things you need to do to improve quality control, production, acquisition, raw materials. Those things can help you make it into a product that we can market. And when I say market that has a price that's in the range that people will purchase it and you can still receive the money you need to pay for the labor and the materials you put into it. And so every person that comes in here is a different marketing strategy for us. We have to rethink what they can do. We can't do an automatic...

Reed:

So, you're not fixed with a standard across the board.

Dial:

Our computer does not. Our computer allows us to change the profit margin for everything. And you have to do that because every person there's, even people who work slower, you know, like the, the elderly mother who come in with the sock monkeys, she has only a certain speed she can go. And so we have to develop a price structure where she still gets what she wants out of it. And so you're constantly having to have these interviews and we tell people, look, you need to be straight up with us because everything we say and trying to tell you how to change or charge, the quality is to help you, not help us. But if you improve your craft, then both of us together can have this good relationship and have a successful marketing strategy and successful economic development for you. But honesty is the only way we're going to be able to do this.

Dial:

So if I tell you, you need to sand this better, you need to change what you're putting on it for a finishing product. You need to have less shine. I mean, there are some woods, but if you make them almost glow in the dark, people don't even get to see the magnificent grain that's in the wood or something. And you can, you can hide the beauty of walnut real easy. We'll just slap it on a straight shine thing. And so you've got to talk about what mixtures to do and everything else to create something that, that make someone fall in love with it so that we can sell what you love to someone else who's fallen in love with it.

Reed:

So about how many shows do you do a year? And how far do you travel? What are the areas?

Dial:

Well, we actually shipped eight boxes of craft to Washington, and we flew out. They paid our way to fly out. Washington state. And we were in Seattle, Washington, and we had a craft show and we did \$3,400 in sales at the craft show, which was good for us and the church paid to ship the crafts home. And so that was the farthest. Now in July the present marketer is going up to New Jersey, New Hampshire and Connecticut. She will be up there for four weeks ...three weeks, and she'll be at four different locations selling crafts. So we're only limited by what we can economically afford. You can't drive all the way to Montana to do one craft show and come back. Just can't afford it.

Reed:

About how many of these do you do a year?

Dial:

We used to try for 24. I looked up on the marketing board and I think she's going to be closer to 25, which is a lot of craft shows. And we have a brand new truck van that's actually a cargo van was donated to the mission oh three or four months ago and they got it fixed up. And it's now the one they're traveling in. And we have boxes that are designed so that you can put three rows of the oversized boxes and four rows of the egg cartons. And they're the same length. And you can stack them on top of each other and fill this four foot by six foot by eight foot trailer and make it tight. So it doesn't go anywhere. And we put all our marketing in it and our computers and everything we want. And we traveled with that van and trailer and we'll fill those 24 tables.

Reed:

So overall, what have you seen as the effect of your program on the individual crafters?

Dial:

You know, I know the primary purpose is economic development ...

Reed:

Can you give me a success story? That really stands out maybe?

Dial:

Probably there's two or three of them where the guy that does the toys. This is a good example. He had his kids sand the toys, and we looked at the labor costs for that and he makes little toys. So he goes from a \$2 toy all the way up to a \$75 toy. So he has this huge range of toys. So what we did was we worked with shows and we created a way that he could show, because if you go in some of these places, if you show them a four foot four shelf program where all his crafts can go from top to bottom, it helps them decide what to buy. Second thing was, we needed to develop a warehouse control system for him. And this man was Mennonite who lives here. And I told him he really needed a computer. And he was really concerned about a computer.

Dial:

And so I had him come and I could show him how, if you ask me for an item, I can tell you exactly how many I have on the shelf. Once he saw that he suddenly recognized what we were talking about. And so I told him, you can buy this computer and don't hook it in anything, just the AC plug that runs the power, and you'd have to worry about any interference around you. He said, okay, well, he found out how he could keep track. He could print invoices that, and when he prints his invoices up, cause we got him an inexpensive program, it reduces his inventory. So when he prints his invoices up and packs it, it is now readjusted as inventory. So he always knows, and he has an alert, which we have here. If you have a craftsperson that produces at the most six in a month, you want to keep 12 on hand.

Dial:

When you get down to six, you turn around and order six more, because then you've always got this other six in here to go, well, he can do the same thing with the toys he can produce easily, or the toys that he can't, or he may have to buy something more for it. And so his individual toy line from the tractor to whatever it is, it pops up and says, you only have four of these. It tells him you only have four of these. And then he knows over the next three or four days, he has to build that inventory back up again. And it's made him extremely successful. And he sells to craft

to craft shops in, in LA, San Francisco, Washington state, Berea, New Jersey, New York. And he's now having grandchildren sanding toys. And we stopped the sanding because we found out if you go to a tool and now I can't think of it, I apologize, but you can let it round off the edges.

Dial:

And all you do is just set it down there and go, and it rounds off all the edges. Turn it over, round off all the edges you're done. You just, no, I, I, I told you I have memory problems because of everything I've got, but it helps him do these things much faster. And if his kids aren't there, he can still build it up. And so it's cut back on his time a lot. He does all hardwoods and he's a success story and he's going to quit because he doesn't have enough grandkids to do the sanding and he's about ready to stop. But he made all his money that he needed. And he had, he built a full garage, big high, two story that holds his wood. He has a shop in the end with all of his tool on the end of it, which he purchased through the sales of this. And he has everything set up to keep him going. His son may take over for him, but he, he developed a full, I mean, you walk into shopping and go, wow. But that's, that was because he started doing all these things to help him do better.

Reed:

That's great. Do you have some traditional Appalachian crafts that you carry here?

Dial:

It would be hard for me to say what's traditional Appalachian anymore. The baskets are disappearing. We have a gal who was taught by CAP to do baskets and we buy most of her baskets.

Reed: And CAP, what does that stand for?

Dial:

Christian Appalachia Project. And so she was taught how to do baskets, but she went beyond just putting together, reed baskets. She added in colors and I mean, just gorgeous work. And so we've been, we pretty well by all her... She does a whole big pickup load comes in and we buy everything. And, and, and unfortunately that's going to be, when we get done with our natural materials baskets the couple that used to make them, the husband passed away suddenly, and she just said, I'm done. So that's the last person that we have in making our natural materials basket. So that's going to be gone. The corn shuck flowers, we have one person and his wife making all of them and that's going to go away because he's got problems and he's on kidney dialysis. And, you know, that's and those are things that's paired. He's also the one that did work on leather tools. And I found out he couldn't see very well. So I found hospital tray system for him. And he could sit on the edge of his bed and crank that tray all the way up to where his eye was to work on his tools. And he thought we'd saved his life. And all we did was find him a hospital bed that we couldn't use over here anymore. And he always has done that.

Reed:

Are you finding that the crafters are aging and there's not a new generation coming up or?

Dial:

Crafting is hard work? Okay. That's, that's the most important thing I can tell you it's hard work. And if you don't have someone that has a heart of what the production is from that hard work and can sense the joy of the completion of the task, then it's going to end because if it's not, then it's just work and it was just work. They're going to find something else to do. We have one family that two of them went to work for the post office and two of them went somewhere else. And the baskets just ended because they found something to do that wasn't as hard, first of all. And second of all, they got their money with having to go out and try to get the materials and fight the snakes off and all the other stuff you've got to do.

Dial:

And I understand that. And, and that's the difference between just simple economic development and finding out that it has to have a heart. That was the hardest part for me to learn, because quite frankly, someone worked with me on making a basket. I lasted seven minutes and said, it's a good thing I don't have to depend on the food that goes in my mouth from making a basket because it's just not my thing. Well, it turns out crafts are not my thing to do, crafts are my thing to fall in love with convince other people, to buy it and make other people satisfied from what they put into it. I can't imagine the joy I've had working with people and finding their joy. And a lot of them had it, they just didn't know what it was. They, they had something that they like making and nobody in the holler wanted it.

Dial:

And so they just quit making it. And you'd say, bring me everything that you've ever made from when, when you started doing this. Like when I was 20. Sure. That'll be fine. And I could find out something they made when they were 24 years old. And now they're 50, but I know people will buy that item because I'm going way beyond the holler with these marketing systems. And so they go back to making the stuff like that, that they used to, and some of the crafts, you know, idiot stick, you can sell an idiot stick forever, cause you can always find an idiot. I'm sorry. That's just the way we put it. That's my sales pitch. (laughs)

Reed:

Does Red Bird Mission belong to any of the other state craft organizations?

Dial:

No.

Reed:

Have you in the past?

Dial:

We were back in the beginning, but I really felt that the advantage of being an independent organization means that we could transition to any kind of crafts we wanted to, that were marketable and people would buy and we didn't have to worry about anything. And when we go to churches, we represent every single one of our craftspeople. When we go every single one of them, we're able to put product out there and sell it. I can't do that from any other organization. And I will not be bound by those organizations to negate the possibility of someone else, having a chance to make money.

Reed:

Has Red Bird Mission received awards throughout the years for their program?

Dial:

I think we've been only noticed by how long we've been in the programs. We got an award from the Kentucky Craft Market, but I think that's it. And I've never paid attention to it. I think, you know, when people want to look at where this craft program has gone and there are people that want to say, look what Craig has done. No, I've had staff that helped me with ideas. I can't take credit for having so much fun I couldn't stand it. When I retired, it broke my heart. But at the same time, I was 67 years old and tired of traveling and everything else.

Reed:

How many years were you director here?

Dial:

27 years. But this was the love I had, was this craft shop. Everything we did, I got more joy out of this than anything. I had other jobs I did, which I greatly enjoyed, but I didn't touch people the same way I could touch crafts. And I think probably my greatest sorrow is that the craft program became so complex that I was no longer able to go visit craftspeople like I used to because I was too busy marketing and selling and they came to me, but I missed going out. Let me tell this story.

Dial:

First of all, you need to understand mountain people don't talk a lot. They don't brag a lot and you know, already, now I talk a lot. So it was very difficult for me to sit quietly and wait for them to form a sentence or a paragraph. Tell me what they think. And this one craftsman said, you need to come out to the house sometime for breakfast. I want to show you something. So I came out to his house. I got there at six o'clock and his wife fixed breakfast, which consisted of bacon, sausage, pork chops, ham, potatoes, eggs, and we ate and she kept bringing me coffee and asked me if I wanted something else. And I'm on the porch. And it's now almost 7:30. I have been there as, and, and you know what we do. I have been here for an hour and a half, but I'm sitting quietly because I'm learning.

Dial:

And he had this most magnificent Colorado spruce, blue spruce across from the house in front of the barn. It was probably 30 feet tall. It was perfect. And I'd grown up in Colorado around Colorado spruces and I loved those. Where'd that come from? He said, ah one of the missionaries gave it to me and I planted it. So I'm sitting here watching it and all of a sudden he says, watch now here they come. And I looked, and these what they call canaries, there was like a hundred of them. And you know what I'm talking about, the yellow Finch were flying in and out of this magnificent spruce tree, the sun was shining over our shoulder on it. I was amazed and I finally said to him, does this happen every year? He goes, no, it's the first time it's ever happened. I love telling that story.

Reed:

But he knew it was coming. (laughs)

Dial:

It was the first year that ever happened.

Reed:

Okay, great. This has been wonderful and I've learned a lot. Are there any other special stories that you would like to tell us?

Dial:

Oh, I've got so many of them. Unfortunately, I'm old, so I forget them. But I think probably the best thing I can say was when I was getting ready to retire, I went out to see one of my craftspeople. And I will tell you this, if you're not family, you don't normally get hugged by a mountain man.

Dial:

But he hugged me. He said, do you promise to come back and see me? And I make special trips to see him. And he said, you've been the best friend I've ever had. And he was one of our craftspeople. And I told Karen, as we left, I said, you can drive because I still got to cry some more. I said, you know, you never know how you touch people's lives when you care for them. But you get to see that somewhere along the line, you made the right decision. You cared enough to help someone be what they could be. And when you got finished, there's this proud person. Who's had a life of creation sitting alone in a little holler and felt like somebody. And he had enough love to give back that I got hugged.

Reed:

Thank you.

Dial:

You're welcome.

Reed:

That's a good place to end. Yeah.

Camera man:

Get some room tone. I'm just going to record the sound in the room for 20 seconds. Just don't say anything. Room tone. Okay. Thanks.

END OF INTERVIEW