

Kentucky Craft History and Education Association, Inc.

Interview with Fran Redmon

October 16, 2007

Interview conducted by Greg Willihnganz

WILLIHNGANZ: First . . . I like to just . . . talk with you, Fran, about – and I sort of, my interview style, if you will is a little loose.

REDMON: That's fine.

WILLIHNGANZ: Sometimes I talk a little bit about . . .

REDMON: Conversational?

WILLIHNGANZ: things I've heard, it's a little more conversational, and you know, what we're doing here is not investigative reporting. What . . .

REDMON: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . we're interested in is basically painting a good portrait of the artist and the Guild itself . . .

REDMON: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . with the hopes that we can get some funding and then do something that will promote the Guild further in the future. And that's basically what we are doing. So I'd like to start out if we could, just talking a little bit about you as a, a crafts person, an artist and what you've done? Maybe you could . . .

REDMON: Just me personally, outside . . .

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah.

REDMON: . . . of my wor . . . my career?

WILLIHNGANZ: Well I'd like to, including your career aspects, that touch on that as well, and, you know, just tell me . . . give me a sort of a rough idea.

REDMON: Because you know, I am not a working artist . . .

WILLIHNGANZ: Right – well . . .

REDMON: . . . per se.

WILLIHNGANZ: Well . . .

REDMON: Okay.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . frankly . . .

REDMON: I have the training, but . . .

WILLIHNGANZ: It shocks me how few of the people that I have met are working artists [Laughter – Redmon]. I mean, they are either teachers, or they're . . . they are in some other field, and I, you know, I talked to . . . I think his name is Neal, I can't think of his last name now, but he is, you know, full time furniture maker. He builds furniture. Then he does his glass sculpture that are just whoa, they're terrific!

REDMON: Oh, you're talking about Dan Barnes?

WILLIHNGANZ: That's who I am talking about!

REDMON: Neil Dan Barnes.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah.

REDMON: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah. And . . . you know, he is a terrific individual.

REDMON: Yeah, he is great.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . and fascinating stuff that he does, very impressive stuff!

REDMON: He is, he is doing so well.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah. Well he is, he is interesting . . .

REDMON: Yeah [Chuckling].

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . at any rate, tell me how you got into crafts?

REDMON: Yeah. I think my training, my interest in the arts is certainly what led me into having an ima . . . and more of an administrative role in the arts in Kentucky, but I was . . . inclined to be in the arts from an early age. I went to Western Kentucky University, majored in commercial art. That was my intent to be a commercial artist. A new program there what they really did was combine components of programs from different departments. I took classes in studio art, had a major studio in weaving, and we took mass communications classes and industrial education classes to create a commercial art. So, it's a little different than, in what you might get in graphic arts today, but . . . certainly that was my background. My first job was with the State of Kentucky in the Creative Services Agency. That's where I met my husband Garry, coincidentally. Yeah, that's how I got my job in the state government and through a series of reorganizations. This program was begun under John Y. Brown's administration, when his wife, Phyllis took a direct interest in the crafts of the state. And as most first ladies do, they have somewhat of a personal campaign. So she hung her hat on the crafts of the state and decided to promote them, and I was in the right place at the right time and, and evolved into the, the job that eventually c . . . became Director of the Kentucky Craft Marketing Program.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay.

REDMON: That's a nutshell [Chuckling] version of it, so.

WILLIHNGANZ: And then what was your involvement with the Guild, and when did that begin?

REDMON: Well, coming into this program . . . the Guild had such a history in the state. When you look at the state of Kentucky and what was in place, there was really a great foundation of, of arts, history, support for crafts, working cooperatives in the state, and the Guild was at the forefront of what had been done historically with crafts in the state. I was very aware of the Guild, having seen their – my first

awareness with their store there in, in Chevy-Chase, and that was, had brought to my attention the fact that there were a lot of working artists across the state of Kentucky...certainly very much involved in the early years, going to the Guild fairs as a way of resourcing crafts people in the state for the work that we did, and, you know, using that as a resource to bring in buyers and other people that we were working with, magazines to present the work to the state.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay.

[Door knocking sounds]

REDMON: (unintelligible) ring the doorbell? (unintelligible). Isn't it always the way?

WILLIHNGANZ: Do you need to answer that?

REDMON: No, Garry will get it.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay.

REDMON: Garry?

WILLIHNGANZ: We can stop for a moment . . .

REDMON: (Put it on pause then?)

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . if you want to get that. Okay, you can go ahead.

REDMON: I, I think I lost my place [Chuckles – Willihnganz]. We were talking about the Kentucky Guild and, and the, the involvement that I've had with the Guild. Many of the . . . working artisans in the state were certainly juried members of the Kentucky Guild, and when we set up the jury process for the Kentucky State Program, we certainly looked at the work that the Kentucky Guild had done. We used their members as jurors. In the early years, we partnered with the Guild on some workshop programming, knew about the . . . the Guild train, learned about that . . . attended some of their events. So, there were partnerships with the Guild through the years that we, we certainly developed and worked on developing.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay. And . . . as you've looked at the history of . . . of arts and crafts development in Kentucky, how have other agencies impacted on the Guild and vice versa?

REDMON: Well, I think one of the unique things about the state of Kentucky in regard to this activity, the work to support artists and craftsmen, is there, that there has been a strong working collaboration between the different groups. The Guild certainly was one of the first, one of the most established programs. So, we all relied heavily on that interaction, and the approach that I think we had for most of us, as new programs got started, things like the Kentucky Artisan Heritage Trails, or the Kentucky School of Craft, was to always use that foundation of, of work that existed as a place to begin and to interact in our program rather, to be in a more competitive. I know the Kentucky Guild . . . you know, has...relied on grants from the Kentucky Arts Council, and I think they were probably closely involved with the work that was done to set up the artisan center in Berea, working closely with the center there at Eastern Kentucky University for some of the new programming that has been done in the state.

WILLIHNGANZ: Tell me more about what your role has been, what you've actually done on this whole development process.

REDMON: The, the impetus for the program . . . the craft program, was a series of department store promotions that Phyllis George initiated, and that sort of, just kind of brought to our attention the needs of the, the crafts people in the state. We were expecting them at that stage to be, be and act as business people, and most of them really weren't. They had been doing this work more as a hobby, sort of selling to friends and neighbors and . . . attending some local fairs and festivals, and all of the sudden, we were thrusting them into a national spotlight, and getting a lot of national attention from this. So, it brought to our attention, one, the potential from marketing this work, but, in the immediate, more of a need to ha . . . assist them in their own development. And, the focus of the programming at the state level, was to try to develop those skills, to provide the resources that they needed, to, to be a working professional, and to help them be prepared to respond to many of the opportunities that were coming our way, through this type of national promotion. So, the focus of the Kentucky Craft Marketing program was geared more toward marketing outside the state, marketing directly to shops and retailers and magazines and catalogs and things like that. So, that was the ho . . . that was a new frontier, in terms of the work that had been done in the state to that point. But, it was all a building block . . . from what was there already. I don't think we could have done the work that we were able to do, had there not been a strong Kentucky Guild, which had built a base of support for artists in the state, had given them a voice. The reputation of Berea, that was tied to the college, and the Guild, and the fairs there, people all over the country – when we went to New York from the very beginning, a lot of people would come into our displays, our booth area and say, is all this work

from Berea? And I think a lot of the reputation from the state as a craft center was because of the city of Berea, the existence of the Kentucky Guild, and the work of Berea College in the field of crafts. So that, that was inherent to the work we did. Just as I've heard Victoria Fiaro say that she could not have done the work with the Kentucky Artisans Center in promoting such a large inventory of products to tourists, had the Kentucky Craft Marketing program not been in existence, and been able to develop for twenty years the artist capacity to take advantage. So, it seems like each thing had sort of naturally . . . built on the one that, that came before.

WILLIHNGANZ: Now you said that – you were talking about a national interest in Kentucky crafts and whatnot, did the, the c . . . the Guild's craft train have any kind of impact nationally? I've – my impression was that this was primarily within the state and that's . . .

REDMON: No. I don't think at that time it did. I don't know that – that was before my time.

WILLIHNGANZ: Right.

REDMON: I don't know how aware people were about that. Probably it did have more of an impact. It, within the state of making people aware that we had this strong tradition, and I think that's what the Guild had done. They made the people of the state aware that we had the, this range and quality of artists working here. There was a respect for that, and a pride in that that came a lot from the Guild, Guild's work, and I, and again I think we were just able to sort of ratchet it up to maybe not a better level but to a, a different level of promotion.

WILLIHNGANZ: Mm-mm. Has it pretty much been a steady progression in terms of interests and support for craftwork and . . . craft marketing?

REDMON: I think it's been a r . . . you know, really amazing that state government support continued as long as it has. Usually a, a, it's not atypical for what a new governor begins for the next one to come in, if they see that as a pet project of a former administration, they may tend to walk away from it. But what happened in this case is that, the, administration that followed actually chose to support it and enhance it, and to, to have that continuation in state government is sometimes unusual. But I think it seemed, it clicked, it clicked on a lots of level, it clicks on . . . you know, in looking at economic development, it relates to the tourism industry, and with the direction that the state's been going in, with changes and the coal economy, and tobacco farming, and this need for so . . . sort of alternative resources in our state. Tourism is one of the areas that the state focuses on, it's our

third largest industry. The arts and culture have become a big focus of tourism in Kentucky, because that's one of our strength and that's one of our draws. We are not a destination state per se, we are not some place where people set out to go, but as things like cultural heritage have been, become more popular to tourists, we were able to capitalize on the interest in crafts as part of that, and the fact that we had such a strong foundation of work that had gone on when those opportunities came along we were better prepared.

WILLIHNGANZ: The crafts work now seems (Clears throat) almost . . . oriented to a more mass market than it's ever been before, and I look at organizations that are sort of . . . what I would call halfway between manufacturers and actual artisans, and . . . we have various . . . Louisville Pottery, for instance . . .

REDMON: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . and those types of operations where they make a craftwork but they mass produce . . .

REDMON: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . essentially, although they do a lot of it by hand.

REDMON: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: And . . . do you feel like these types of businesses are actually increasing the awareness of crafts in the participation, in the process, or does it basically take the place . . . place of what would be produced by individual artisans?

REDMON: I don't think it takes the place of it, I think the p . . . the market is, is really bigger than the supply could ever meet? If anything, we probably could have more producers? So an artist may tell you differently than that, but the other thing that's happened is that the diversification of the market place has changed a lot too, and even if you look within the craft field, there is a range of people who do more very production oriented up into more one of the kind, like Dan Barnes you mentioned, his pieces are, are not very production oriented, but he is doing very well. That's a different niche of the market. So the market has sort of diversified because of the expended interest in craft. What's sort of happening now, and it's happened before bec . . . during, when you've had an economic recession as we did

following nine-one-one, what I've always heard is that your middle price points tend to drop out and people are either, you s . . . the market that's always had the discretionary income to afford the higher end pieces, you know, the five hundred and on up . . . never goes away. But a lot of people that might have been spending a hundred or a hundred fifty dollars are now looking more to (unintelligible) price points. We were seeing that . . . with our event, Kentucky Craft: The Market that there was that sort of splitting of, you know, losing the middle range of, of prices. So, you know, the market for crafts changes just like other things that go on in society in the economy, it's affected by people's interest . . . but crafts, I think, are here to stay, and not only are they more popular because of things that are going on, the crafts are influencing to some extent design and things that are going on in other industries. I mean you can see it in catalogs and magazines and things like HGTV, this sort of creative expression that's going on in all areas of people's endeavors, so there is a real blending, that's what I see. The crafts are being influenced, but they are also influencing.

WILLIHNGANZ: It's kind of interesting to me when I, I look at the history of crafts, and I don't know if I am correct in my perception of this because, as I said, I'm relatively new to this . . .

REDMON: Mm-mm.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . I don't consider myself crafts (unintelligible). I've done a lot of woodwork, but I am not really on that level, and, you know, I go to of course some fairly high up . . . high [Chuckling] end, if you will . . . craft fairs, you go Saint James and . . .

REDMON: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . you watch these dazzling product flow at you in so many people so talented in so many areas, and not that many of them come from Kentucky – some . . .

REDMON: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . but a lot of them travel from California to be in this, because it's the second biggest or third biggest, or whatever it is in the country. But, I look at all this and I think to myself, in some ways is it similar to what's happened in the food processing area, you know, where, where at one time we made food because we needed to eat . . .

REDMON: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . and that's what we did, and then food became industrialized and we bought it, and still do buy it, by and large. And now what we see is this resurgence of organic foods and . . . wild oats and all these different stores giving us designer foods which are . . .

REDMON: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . specific and sort of the same parallel thing happened in crafts it seems, that one time we built chairs because we needed a chair, and now it's artisans who design a unique looking chair that, that suits a particular thing, and I'm just sort of fascinated by what we're doing with craftwork and, you know, when you look at what you're doing to promote craftwork in Kentucky, what really is your goal? What do you hope to accomplish with that?

REDMON: I think at its basis, we were hoping to enable artists to be able to live and work as artists, to provide a viable environment where they could pursue the work that they desired to do, whatever that was, and be successful in doing it. Second ter . . . – . . . dary to that was making people aware that it existed and in some cases helping to create markets for work where the awareness didn't exist. But the artists were there, and many, you know, they were at, they were looking for market. Some of them were more successful than others and y . . . we don't want to paint so rosy a picture to make everyone think this is a g . . . very lucrative . . . endeavor, it's really not, but it's a l . . . I've always looked at it as a lifestyle choice, that there are people who are prone to do the arts that flourish m . . . more if that's where they're working, and maybe they make certain sacrifices in terms of their lifestyle, in order to be happy doing the work that they were called to do, and whatever we were able to do to enhance their ability to maybe be a little more prosperous, a little more happy . . . in the work that they were doing, and, and the arts play a role in, in other things that we are trying to do in the state. Maybe that's not – people don't feel the direct benefits of having working artists in your community, but they enhance many things, aside from just the direct work that they are doing. If you look at what's going on in society, and the changes that everybody is going through . . . it's any form of the arts helps sort to connect us and ground us, and make us feel connected to who we are and where we are going, and help us relate better to one another. So, if you're buying craft, it may be you are a would-be artist or just an appreciator of art, you sort of share in that process by actually purchasing and owning it and having it in your home. The work that I have in my house, whenever someone comes here, there is a conversation, which inevitably

leads to if they like or don't like it, who did it, and you talk about the artist. So, it ho . . . it tells a story . . . about the people and places that we live.

WILLIHNGANZ: Well, I look at what we do . . . with the, the craft fairs, and whatnot, the juried . . .

REDMON: Mm-mm.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . advance, basically and, the question that comes to my mind is, are we actually promoting more craft work, or are we basically redefining it on a level of quality that discourages people from actually doing this stuff. Because I, personally, and I built, you know, the, the bed that we sleep on, and the, a dresser...

REDMON: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . around the place and cabinets, medicine cabinets and various things that I have hung around the house, and I go to . . . to any of these fairs practically and I am pretty intimidated by the woodwork I see. I mean . . .

REDMON: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . I can see guys doing stuff that I can't begin to do, and we've just bought our first marquetry piece, and we never bought a piece like this before, and all the marquetry I had seen previously was pretty, I thought, pretty boring and sort of . . . clichéd, and we saw this stuff and my wife and I both said, "this is incredible stuff," and it is. It's a large piece and it . . . it's got nine hundred and ninety-eight pieces separate pieces (and I know it's got?) twenty-eight types of wood and it's got mica and it's got mother-of-pearl and all these inlays, and it cost a lot of money for us [Chuckling]. We've never invested that much in a piece of art work that wasn't for charity, we've done some charity things that were a little outrageous, but . . . but this was just at the Saint James Art Fair, and we saw this and that's incredible, we couldn't even believe it was possible to do this stuff, it's amazing.

REDMON: Mm-mm.

WILLIHNGANZ: But I look at that and I think to myself, there's no way I will ever get into marketry after looking at what this guys has created [Chuckling]. I mean, you can't touch this, [Chuckling] . . .

REDMON: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . you just can't. But maybe it's enough to just get an appreciation of it . . .

REDMON: Exactly!

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . and that's, you know, that's a good enough thing there.

REDMON: Well, the whole area of hobby work is, it's there and it, I think it's probably growing bigger than it's ever been. We hear a lot of that do yourse . . . do yourselfers and the whole concept of jurying versus non-jurying work, versus people just working in this area. I think that's changing, we had a young group of working artists at our national conference that we just attended, and we sort of wanted to hear what it is this generation doing? What are they thinking, and how are they approaching this? And they're, they're thinking about it and approaching it in a different way. They are not joiners as much, they are not coming to these organizations, they're really getting involved, they're sort of forming their own little associations and, and doing it their way. Probably on the horizon, there's going to be changes in how all of this is playing out, you know, most of the organizations that had been around, have built their reputations on having high standards, a jury process, and setting, raising the bar to establish a, a level of quality work. But, that doesn't mean people can't participate at any and all levels, just like there is major masterpieces hanging in museums in the top cities around all the o . . . you know, across the world. That doesn't stop people from sitting in their backyard painting. If, if that didn't exist, maybe more people would, you know, fewer people would do it. So, I think, it's not going to stop anyone from doing the work. Probably the more you appreciate it, the more engaged you are. And I think there's probably a fair number of people who produce and also buy work. And some that would only purchase it, but we need, we need the collectors, we need the appreciators, we need the people who have the resources to admire the work and want to bring it and put it in their homes.

WILLIHNGANZ: The Guild seems to have started with a real big push from the governor and from the railroad, and from a whole bunch of sources that sort of came together, a lot of stuff from Berea College . . .

REDMON: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . a lot of energy went into this; this of course is back in the sixties . . .

REDMON: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . when it started in sixty . . . two I believe it was. And that went on for a certain period of years, and they had the Guild train going around, and then they started the fairs . . .

REDMON: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . and, and I have some great tape with Fred Shepherd . . . talking about the, the original, the first Guild fair when you walked out down this trail into these fields, and they said, "okay, you want to set up, [Laughter – Redmon] there is some rocks here and there is some planks and you can set your stuff . . .

REDMON: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . on that" [Chuckling]

REDMON: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . that's . . . There were no tents, there were no light, there was no electricity, there was no running water [Chuckling]. It was pretty primitive, but that's how they started and . . .

REDMON: Exactly.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . and so it got going and progressively went. But, it seems like the level of commitment from the government at least . . . seemed to back off a bit, and there have been people who I, I have talked with who have questioned where the Guild is at right now . . .

REDMON: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . whether it has a significant role, what do you . . . see as what's going on now?

REDMON: Well, I think I'm becoming aware that, that a lot of organizations have life cycles, and anytime you're dealing with government, you know, change is even more prevalent. So you, it's hard to predict what is being supported currently, if it will continue to be supported down the road. With politics coming in to play, I'm sure the Guild was happy to have gotten the support that they had. I know that that's changed over the years in terms of the money that, that state government was giving them and, and I'm aware of the fact that probably some people were concerned at the time that they started the program, Kentucky craft, crafted within state government, because perhaps they thought that was funding that maybe should have gone to the Guild. But, that's part of the reason we always try to work as cooperatively as we could with the Kentucky Guild. I know that their leadership has changed over the years and the thing, same thing is going to happen with the other organizations in the state. There is an ebb and flow to how organizations work and how they grow. I do feel like we are in some kind of state of change in the state of Kentucky with organizations. I'm not sure what it is, or how that's going to affect it in the long run. I think the Guild has been trying to look at maybe making changes as we all do, just like when they moved the, the fair, one of the fairs to northern Kentucky, based on maybe what they perceived to be some waning interest, or as a way to maybe grow some interest in other parts of the state. And I think you have to try those things as you go through your organization life cycle. You have to look at making adjustments. Leadership is an issue, leadership is an issue in this industry across the country, because it's maybe not a field that the youth is going into, and we question that in a national conference. Where is the youth leadership coming up that will ensure the future of these organizations, because a lot of the membership of the Kentucky Guild has been there for a long time, the leadership is starting to turn over, and all the new people stepping up to take it on. There's been a – there is a lot of loyalty within the Guild among the founding members. Many of them have begun to pass or are up in years. And, a lot of the people that have served as . . . you know, board members have probably gotten a little tired, and I know there's been some turnover. And sometimes that's good. I mean, and you may go through a period of diversity and change where you feel like you're struggling, but sometimes you come out of that stronger. So I don't know, I don't know where that's leading. I have retired from state government, there are changes going on within the arts council, as to how they are supporting it, the arts in Kentucky, and how they're working with the crafts in relationship to the other arts disciplines, and that's already changing. So I don't know where that's going to end up in context of what's going on across the state. But, there are changes, I can definitely feel them happening but I, I can't really predict at this point how it's going to affect what everybody is doing.

WILLIHNGANZ: Are there other organizations that are similar, and are on the level of the Guild that have arisen over the years?

REDMON: In the state or . . .

WILLIHNGANZ: In the state.

REDMON: Not really, no, and, and the d . . . the unique distinction with the Kentucky Guild of Artists and Craftsmen has been that it's a member-based organization. It's the volunteer leaderships supported by the very members that it also serves. So that makes it inevitable . . . that's fairly typical of art Guilds around the country. The membership is made up of those who hope to benefit from what the organization is doing. In our case we were a state government organization staffed with funding coming directly from the state with a mission to serve the artists and crafts people of the state. The other strong organization that's come along in re . . . in the last twenty-five, thirty years is the Kentucky Museum of Arts and Craft in Louisville, which is our sister organization. Their f . . . their base of support is fi . . . primarily from patrons who come on as board members, because they are in a position to bring resources to the industry. So those are very, there are three organizations that have similar missions. But, the difference has more to do with how the, the organization is put together and how it's organized and structured. So, the difference in the Kentucky Guild is it's sort of a voice for artists by artists, and I think that's always been important that, that they have their own association. But, it also is the very thing that at sometimes causes them to struggle.

WILLIHNGANZ: Mm-mm.

REDMON: . . . because the, the very people that are benefiting from the organization have to also run the organization, raise the money for the organization, set the policies for the organization. It's a lot to ask for a group to do, and to constantly foster and to ingrow that new leadership to come on board.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah, I think there is a fair amount of concern about the number of younger artisans who are getting involved in it, because it's not where they would want it to be, and there's questions about where they can take this, if they don't have a, a base.

REDMON: Exactly, and that's a question we're hearing across the country, and what I've probably learned the last two conferences, or we're beginning to, to sense is that we have to begin to, not just set back and wonder where the youth are,

and why they aren't participating [Chuckling]. We have to start talking with them and, and really hearing that they have a different perspective on maybe how this all should work. And, it may be, mean that a . . . agencies and organizations have to begin to change how they actually function, if they're going to attract and serve the younger generation. I think that's probably something we were all beginning to, to look at.

WILLIHNGANZ: In this state, do we have the kind of support for . . . crafts people and artisans that other states provide? Are we lagging behind?

REDMON: We are actually leaders in this field. We ha . . . we are seen nationally as probably, if not the best state, one of the very leading states in this field. That's, it, you can talk to a lot of people and you will hear that. So it's, like I said, it's a point of pride, and as I was saying earlier, it comes from this strong rich tradition of crafts that were sort of protected and, and grew out of Eastern Kentucky from what you said, the need for people to produce things that they actually use in their daily lives, the quilts and the chairs, and, and the pottery or whatever, and at some point there became an effort to preserve and protect that. So, groups came out of, you know, an interest of . . . trying to fight poverty in Eastern Kentucky, and provide opportunities, so they looked to the crafts and they developed co-ops, the Guild came out of the work that was being done in the southern highland region. So, there is and, and the work at Berea College, which was the same thing, to support the artist coming out of . . . not early artist but students coming out of the Appalachia, so the Appalachian Heritage has a lot to do with what has evolved in the way of craft in the state of Kentucky. But, the interesting thing, when I came back from this conference, and we had, we were in Canada, and a lot of their provincial groups were presenting, and as I heard the history it, it struck me that not only in the United States, but in Canada there was this sort of simultaneous thing. All the organizations were between twenty-five and forty years old. So, there was sort of some kind of renaissance or something that happened about the same time that developed this industry that didn't use to exist. What was the thing, in my mind, that suddenly there were working artists out there that felt the need to, to generate some organizational structure to support the work that they were doing. So, we are not unique in Kentucky, we are not unique in the United States even, for this sort of trend, or this movement that happened twenty-five or thirty years ago. But, everybody has gone in slightly different directions and how they've done it. We've been lucky enough in Kentucky that we've had leadership visionary people who latched on to it and said we want to support it. We want to help it grow and be even stronger and even better. And it's happened on lots of levels, and it's continuing to happen in, in cities and towns across Kentucky, programs in Paducah, in, in Ashland and down in southeastern Kentucky and it's not limited to any particular region, and different groups are doing it in different ways. But the bottom line is they're saying arts are an important part of our history, culture and our economy, and we have to continue to, to foster that in some way. So whether it's local government, state government, or you know, private public partnerships, it's, it's happening in different

ways across the state of Kentucky. But, Kentucky is a leader in, in the work they were doing.

WILLIHNGANZ: Now some of the artwork that we're getting into, the craftwork that we're getting into is not necessarily indigenous to us, I m . . . wh . . . thinking, for instance of the . . . the growth, the tremendous growth in glass . . .

REDMON: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . work. And . . . as near as I can see, this has been relatively recent . . .

REDMON: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . but it is growing by leaps and bounds. My wife is involved with the University of Louisville . . .

REDMON: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . which has a glass shop that they are – a glass program that they are planning to expend dramatically.

REDMON: Mm-mm.

WILLIHNGANZ: I don't know if you're acquainted with museum plaza and that whole plan?

REDMON: Yes, uh-huh, yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: Well, if that all goes through, and it's a big if, but, if the . . . hundreds of millions come down the pike and we actually get this thing up in the air, they're, they're talking [Chuckling] about a twenty stories up having this glass shop which seems kind of . . .

REDMON: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . amazing . . .

REDMON: Far fetched, but . . .

WILLIHNGANZ: It, it seems far fetched [Chuckling] . . .

REDMON: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . it does. But . . . but I wonder how diversified we get, or can get, without perhaps in some way compromising our cultural heritage.

REDMON: Well, you know, it's hard to close yourself off from what's happening in the world, and I think as we grew, as we became recognized for a state that supported artists, you began to attract interest. So, as we send artists out in the world, which we've done, to national markets and shows and things like that, inevitably, they're going to be influenced by what's going on around the country, with programs like the American Craft Enterprises, and the Rosen Agency, and the big popular shows that they've put on, yeah, most of us are aware that popular items are glass and pottery, big items in the national shows. I think that's influencing what's happening here, strong programs at Centre College – I mean Stephen Powell's directly responsible for growing a base of, of glass artists in, in the state of Kentucky, and that's sort of, you know, you're building new traditions. So, maybe that's a new tradition that we are developing, growing a base of working glass artists out of the strength of Stephen Powell and the work that he's done at Center College. I mean, throughout history things don't stay static, but we've built on our history and we've built on our traditions, and I don't know right, at some point are we going still have weavers and, and basket makers, and dulcimer makers, I don't know. I know that's the work that the folk like program's involved in and I think what you're doing this is part of the what we have to do, if we can't continue the work we at least preserve the history and the story, and protect it and continue to tell it, just like what's happened in agriculture. No longer is, you know, how long is it going to be before no one grows tobacco in the state of Kentucky? Now that's not a positive thing, I mean that's a good thing maybe, but it's also part of our heritage and our history. So, they are going to build a museum, an agriculture museum, and we will be talking for many years about the role that, that tobacco crops played – played in the history of the state. We don't to forget it! And we've all been influenced by it, it's part of who we are, and I think that's, you know, there will probably be for a long time the traditional crafts will, will continue. I think there is enough people doing that, but it's a reflection on what's happening across the country and this, this whole field of what we call arts and crafts, new media are springing up and, and more people are collecting and buying this work. So whatever is the popular thing, maybe, is

probably influencing to some degree what's being produced and how much those different media areas are growing.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah, and I look at what our . . . technology is giving us, and, and what the lines have traditionally been and you know, what I am doing with the video camera and the program on my computer at home is a sort of craft . . .

REDMON: Exactly.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . and the fact is, there are probably a lot more fourteen years old who are doing what I am doing than there are making pots.

REDMON: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: [Chuckling] because they've got access to Dad's thing and you can get a video editing program with your computer . . .

REDMON: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . you don't have to ask for it, they did a . . . they bundle it right in, and so a lot of people are moving in those convenience areas, and we are going to see, I think a lot more of that sort of stuff, but I sort of . . . it saddens me to think you know, I only discovered, if you will, a, a basket weaving about ten years ago. Previous to that I have thought, you know, that was what the idiot kids did in high school, they got, went into basket weaving and, and then, then I went to one of the museums and I saw these baskets that just were breath taking, I couldn't believe . . .

REDMON: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . anyone could do this with, with the concepts of bas . . . it changed my whole perspective.

REDMON: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: And, at the same time I am aware that's not an art I think that we practice that much in this state, is it?

REDMON: It's probably a dying art. There's some pockets . . . there is a couple of generations of families that have made the white oak baskets and have passed that down for a long time. It will be interesting to see if the ones that have been doing it continue to, to pass it on. I know that's the work . . . work of the folk life program to try to set up apprenticeships with master artisans so that there can be that sort of passing on of the skill and, and the craftsmanship and the tradition. It's not happening in a big way. I don't know if it's going to be enough to save [Chuckling] the future of our traditions, so . . . I think it's a question, it's something we're all talking about, I don't know if anyone has figured out how we deal with it.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah, it's very tricky. I have a, a very close friend, a life long friend who is a bookbinder in Ann Arbor, Michigan. And of course, his bread and butter his . . . masters and PhD thesis in Ann Arbor. I mean you got the University of Michigan, that's what he makes his living off of basically, and he's got four people who work with him and they grind them out. But what he loves to do [Chuckling] is to work on restorations for three-hundred year old bibles and . . .

REDMON: Whoa!

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . he does some amazing work in terms of bringing old books back and re . . . re . . . building them and restoring them. And he also does a lot of what I consider very creative craftwork, amazingly creative craftwork for specific artists, and he does bindings for authors that are presentation copies. So he . . . does Stephen King's version of 'Fire Starter' in asbestos with this bright red leather, it looks like flames and gold on the front and . . . you know, he makes – I think he made fifty or seventy copies for Stephen King who passed them out to all his buddies.

REDMON: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: And he charges them a pretty fair price for each one of those bindings, and they glorious, they're terrific. He's done stuff for Isaac Asimov and various people, and that's a whole craft field I was unaware of.

REDMON: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: I mean I knew books got bound, but I never really thought of it as an artistic endeavor where you made a, a limited number as you would with . . .

REDMON: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . anything. And I sort of see, some of these crafts are coming into play and some are going out, but he said, a lot of the equipment in his shop, and he's taken me through a shop. In fact, I worked there for a . . . a week one time, a lot of his equipment is seventy, a hundred years old, some is a hundred and fifty years old. He has these very old, old typefaces and things and he uses . . .

REDMON: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . some of the traditional ways of doing it, and there is a, there is a guy on television, I have forgotten his name, who is a woodworker, who doesn't have any electric tools. It's all the old colonial tools . . .

REDMON: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . and . . .

REDMON: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . he's got all these different things that you did back then, and it's kind of interesting to me to try and get a handle on what we're doing in the craft world and where it's coming. It seems like, you know, the, the pottery is going very strong, of course, the glass is very strong now, the basket weaving and that sort of thing seems to moving off, weaving seems to moving off.

REDMON: Right, weaving probably is, probably one of the most dying [Chuckling]. You know the weaving that's being done is very functional. Of course, that's how it was used, initially. But decorative weaving is, you just really don't see much of that. You see the rugs and the place mats and, and I think the thing, if you think of that in context of what's happened recently to the Kentucky Guild – not the Kentucky Guild, I'm sorry, you think of that in context of what's happened recently to Churchill Weavers . . . with their hundred-year history there. Well they felt like they basically couldn't compete with the overseas market.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah.

REDMON: And that's a really sad story, but I don't know, you know, sometimes you can't, you can't fight it, you can't fight progress when, and, and this is what's happening in our world. There is such an expectation, everything is speeded up this easy access, immediate gratification, and the kids certainly, this is the world that they live in, and the thought that it takes that long to produce something of that you would even keep, have something that took that long to produce that you would save for years and years. We live in this kind of throwaway society. So how do we adapt to that? I don't know. I think the next generation it's going to be interesting to see, because there is not a respect or an appreciation for anything that takes very long to do [Chuckling] you know, and the games are, you know, the video games or whatever the DVDs, there is a sense that's a disposable thing. Maybe, maybe it will shift, maybe there will be a you know, kind of a throw back that will kind of – I think and I think this whole green environmental . . . theme that we're hearing, it's probably going to be the thing to change it, the idea of not throwing o . . . everything away, but of building things that are intended to last and to be kept and preserved, as opposed to it doesn't have to work for three years because it, as soon as it breaks, just throw it out and get a new one, and that's we do. So, that could have an affect on the future of this industry, and then I think that's we are affected by what's going on in society, and with technology on so many levels, you know, technology in terms of creating craft or whatever, it's a tool, just like something else. It's what you do with it that's important. So, there may be a whole new trend of craft or art that's coming out of these technological resources that people have available to them that they didn't use to have. It's affecting lots of art forms. There are ways to design and create because technology exists that didn't exist before. But does that make that, does that devalue the work, if it's quality. You still have the issues of quality versus new good versus bad, and that's certainly an opinion. But . . . I think people are and s . . . the younger generation is going to adapt to more accessible tools and technology that makes it easier to do the work that they are doing. But we are in flux, we definitely are in flux.

WILLIHNGANZ: Well, it's certainly true, and the Wal-Mart affect is so strong and so much – it's very frightening how much of our daily goods come out of China at the . .

REDMON: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . exact opposite end of the earth, and you think, there is a whole movement, I think in the foods industry, if you've read Barbara Kingsolver's latest book, 'Animal, Mineral, Miracle' . . . she is talking about how far our food travels.

REDMON: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: And it travels – a lot of it, fifteen hundred miles or more . . .

REDMON: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ:. . . coming from South America, and from Europe and all these places, and what the cost of that really is to the environment and to us and . . . whatnot, and so there is that whole movement toward localization . . .

REDMON: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . and I am wondering if that is likely to affect the whole crafts area.

REDMON: I think it probably could. I, I see a change in terms of, we were talking about generations of people that have stayed in this field, and, and the way that they've marketed their work throughout the history of my involvement in this industry, has been to pack up your stuff and take it other places, just like you're saying. Well, what I'm also seeing is that some of those who have been doing this for twenty and thirty years are getting sort of tired of that. They are pulling back from the shows. They're finding alternative ways to make a living from their work. Maybe they're finding new markets, maybe they're deciding to teach . . . but this whole tourism thrust that we've seen is a new thing, whereas we were pushing the crafts out of the state, now we're trying to keep more of them here and use them to attract tourists to develop the, the tourism economy. So, I think there is a change there in terms of people not wanting to travel to market their work. So that could, you know, then how do we develop more of a local market for the products here? That presents a different challenge than what we've been doing in the past. It sort of gets back to what the Guild started doing when they began, taking their work to the people of Kentucky, and through the fairs and, and things like that. But, the difference has been in fifty years there is a greater appreciation now within the state for the work that's being produced here. We've seen a big change with Kentucky Craft: The Market, which is really influenced by the visibility that we had at the co . . . the New York International Gift Fair in the early eighties, and a lot of the buyers were coming from the northeast, coming to Kentucky to place orders, the shops and the galleries with our artists. And in the beginning it was like seventy-five, eighty percent of the shops that were attending were from out of state. In recent years, that's flopped. Now, seventy-five percent are really coming from within the state. And I thought about that and at first it was a frustration because I thought, where, where have all those other buyers gone. And then I stopped to think, well our numbers haven't really gone down, the percentage, the ratio of shops that are now buying product within the state of Kentucky has grown dramatically. And, all of the sudden

it hit me, that's a success story. We've done something by actually creating more markets in Kentucky with k . . . that means we're keeping more of the dollars here when those products sell and turnover, the dollars are staying in, in Kentucky.

WILLIHNGANZ: And of course, you're right, if they bring in tourism, there is all sorts of ancillary . . .

REDMON: Exactly.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . inference. But . . . they're tremendous.

REDMON: But, you know, on one hand, right, crafts are part of what part promoting tourism, they are not going to be the only reason people are going to come here. People will come, I mean there are groups of people that want to have that event available to them. But at the same time, tourism is, is bringing other dollars in for different reasons so.

WILLIHNGANZ: It seems to me that . . . that, the, the Guild was kind of unique in terms of focusing on educating its members . . .

REDMON: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . and not so much from an artist's standpoint but from a business person standpoint, which is the area where frankly most of us [Chuckling] lack . . .

REDMON: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . the skills to even survive regardless of their artistic abilities. If you can't conduct the business part of it . . . you can't survive . . .

REDMON: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . and . . . even if you are a mediocre artist, if you are good at business, you can probably make a living . . .

REDMON: True.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . because there is a market for that stuff. So . . . so it's really interesting to me that, the tendency that's going on there. One of the things that I've sort of seen as a possible value out of . . . the increased . . . arts and crafts movement, if you will, is perhaps more engagement with young people in the school systems. Do you think we're doing enough to promote craftwork in schools? Or, should we be doing more? Or, what do you think is going on there?

REDMON: Well, I think the Kentucky Arts Council, through its arts education program, is doing much as their funding allows them to do. The fact that the core content requires a certain grounding in the arts, it helped facilitate that, but from my own personal experience and what I have seen, we probably aren't doing enough. I know there's, there's many studies that show the value and the benefits of having arts in the schools and how that affects students abilities to learn and, and being successful in other areas of study like math and science. But, probably we are not, even though it's still a requirement, and I don't know, I couldn't you know, I am not the person to ask, but . . . you know, the Guild has done some of that work, the Kentucky Craft Marketing has done some of that work, we have had a training program at the market for probably ten years now to provide some training to teachers in how to utilize craft and art as part of presenting the core content in the, in the schools. And, it's always been a very popular session, it's usually full, we've expanded it and year after year it's continued to grow and the interest has stayed. So, we know there is a demand or the tea . . . the teachers wouldn't be coming, the fact that they are required to teach that as a component. But, it's usually integrated within the curriculum. The arts are sort of woven into other areas. We have this discussion sometimes about arts for arts sake, and as opposed to just using the arts to do other things. So, I think it's a little bit of both. The National Endowment for The Arts has started this 'Poetry Out Loud'; program, which all the states get funding to . . . administer where they're promoting an appreciation for poetry by having kids learn and recite . . . the work of, of you know, our established writers, and they get to compete nationally and I think the goal in that is to inc . . . increase the awareness of writing and, and poetry as an art form. So, I think there is pockets of it that are happening all over, but whether we're being entirely successful, I don't know. I'm sure anyone in the arts field will probably say, we can do much more.

WILLIHNGANZ: What do you think the Guild should do in the years ahead?

REDMON: (Sighs) well, that's a really good question. I think the Guild's struggle so much to maintain their, their leadership. I've always said, I think if you ca . . . they could just find the one thing that they can do well, and, and sustain that successfully, that they would be doing a lot . . . to find where they fit, where the Guilds fits in the current picture of what's going on around the state with the different

organizations. I've often felt that the Guild could be the voice for the artist, that there is probably the potential for them to be almost an advocacy group that could be the ones to support help encourage ongoing funding in these programs that you talk about, because they are the one organization that represents the artist. It's governed by them, for them, and if you have administrators in programs trying to advocate, it's different than if the artists speak for themselves, and I think there is a real role. I've always felt like there is a real role . . . for the Kentucky Guild to, to be an advocate for the artist and to do more advocacy work.

WILLIHNGANZ: Oh, okay. Well . . .

REDMON: That's a very interesting discussion [Laughter – Redmon and Willihnganz]

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah, we've gone a little . . .

REDMON: The philosophical . . .

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . out of field, but I think that's, it's really relevant to what, what is happening in the state and it's important, it's important to think through where we are going with all of this. Because . . . we got a real heritage here, and some of what, what I see happening here is very exciting and very interesting and . . . I'd like to see it promoted, and I hear people saying you know, that's the Guild is really sort of falling apart and we're getting older artists who are . . .

REDMON: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . dropping out and we don't know where this is going to go and . . . we are all going to be Nintendo players and . . . well, that's sort of an art form, but I am not sure I really consider it a craft [Chuckling], and . . .

REDMON: I think it's also really important, and I had hoped to foster this a little more than I was able to in my role. But, I think the groups that do the similar work have to be working together, probably need to be communicating more and planning together, so that we are, you know, strong as a unit, moving in the same direction, so that we know what each other is doing and that it's a cohesive effort, and I think a lot of that has happened. There has been pretty good working relationships with what's also happening now, there is a shift in leadership. There has been a lot of job changes in this field, and across the state in recent years. So

we've sort of have a new group . . . of administrators they – it's not really new, but they sort of play musical chairs, everybody has sort of, you know, moved around and . . . there is only so many arts jobs in the state so, people move from, from one to the other. But, I really feel like that sort of effort to make sure that we are working together and not, and in anyway competing or at odds with one another, and that we sort of talk about . . . to get together and talk about these issues and figure out what we're going to do in Kentucky to address the changes, because we are setting here, really on the kind of edge of I think big changes coming down the pike.

WILLIHNGANZ: Can you talk about what the dynamics of those changes are?

REDMON: Well, they'd be the economy, you know, the changing . . . landscape of private support. It seems like every organization that you're involved with is struggling with how to get funding, you know, in the states, money has been tight in recent years, and the age changing the focus somewhat at how they fund groups. They have more mandated programs and less sort of just money that people can use, and that's what we were feeling even at the state level that we are being mandated to do more things, so there is not much discretionary. So, what people end up doing, they end up adapting programs to where the funding is going, whatever, you know, what other s . . . societal issues are leading funders in these, into a specific focus and organizations have to evolve. They want to continue to receive the funding. They have to move in that same direction, so if you're going to, you kind of need to get ahead of that and not because somebody reacting to it. But, be aware of it as it's developing in being able to respond to it. So, it really always means that you constantly have to adap . . . adapt and grow. We can't, no one can, be static anymore. Funding is tight. I think the political landscape, the economic landscape, the issues of technology, the issues of the next generation, these are all things that are affect – affects everything that's going on. It also affects the – we are not immune . . . from what's going on in the world in all the areas, and everybody has to adapt.

WILLIHNGANZ: Whoa. Okay. I think that's pretty much all [Chuckling] I . . .

REDMON: That's a lot.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . (have in terms?) that's a lot . . .

REDMON: I hope you get . . .

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . just what's there.

REDMON: . . . something from that and . . .

WILLIHNGANZ: Oh I think there's a lot (unintelligible).

REDMON: I think you understand, my history is not so direct with direct involvement with the Guild. It's certainly an awareness of the Guild and it's the role they play. I, I do think the Guild has been a very important institution in the history of craft development in the state, and there were people that have been, that had the foresight - that were leaders, the founders, and that supported the Guild for many, many years, and they've had great success even though they have had periods of struggling and that the place that Kentucky stands today as a leader in this industry would not be, had the Guild not been an important player in its history, so where we go from now, will be interesting to see.

WILLIHNGANZ: And indeed it will, indeed it will. Well, thank you, very much.

REDMON: Thank . . .