Kentucky Craft History and Education Association, Inc.

Interview with Garry Barker

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Interview conducted by Greg Willihnganz

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay, Garry, if you can in a sentence, try to tell me uh what it is you do.

BARKER: Maybe I should tell you what it is I've done (laughter) that it relates.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay.

BARKER: I've, I've been…I invented the term Market Administrator back in 1965 when I started to work for the Southern Handicraft Guild (it was called then) and I had no idea what it was…I just…the director of the Guild showed up in Berea College where I was a student. He wanted somebody to write. Somebody that……didn't talk funny and……and would work. And he promised me I didn't have to wear a tie, and I get to travel a lot. So, I took the job and forgot to ask what it paid or I wouldn't be sitting here. I went to Ashville…

WILLIHNGANZ: Can I interrupt you for one second here. What both of us are gonna have to work on is not squeaking our chairs.

BARKER: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: I wonder if I could ask you to take off your shoes. I know we're gonna, my mike is sensitive enough it's gonna pick up all of that.

BARKER: The squeak right there.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah. Okay, so tell me, you were, you were basically……that history part. Do that part again, cause I wanted to catch that you were in Asheville was it?

BARKER: I went to Asheville, North Carolina in June, 1965, just as an untitled staff member for the Southern Highland Handicraft Guild which is a nine state organization. One of the older, larger ones in the country, and I grew up with homemade…and to be real honest……I'd had about enough homemade chairs, homemade clothes, homemade tools, so I went to Berea. I went as a math major, finally switched over to English, but …now I made that trip to Asheville and found out the value of really well done craftwork, and that just……a wonderful bunch of people and I spent 5 years getting……my master's degree in Craft Administration from Bob Gray, was director of the Guild, and involved in everything, traveled all over the southeast region. We ran retail stores, craft fairs, exhibitions, work shops, and I was the assistant director and……president actually of their market corporation when I left. But…

WILLIHNGANZ: Now (Interrupting) what years were these?

BARKER: '65 through late 1970, but I, you've probably heard it all before and I'm from Kentucky and……I wanted to come home. I loved it in Asheville, and I've kept going back for 40 years. But, …in 1970, Berea College offered me a job with their craft program, and I was kind of flattered, and I was also looking for a way to get back home. And I took the job and moved to Berea, and was hired to run their college's gift shops; and as happy as I was to get back; and as much fun as it was to see everybody again, I

absolutely hated the job. Compared to, I was used to traveling, being involved, and I'm supposed to baby-sit two stores. So, it's a (laughter) so when Richard Bellando decided to take another job, and the Kentucky Guild came and offered me the director's position there, and I didn't think about it for maybe 2 minutes, and went ahead and took that position…and I was with the Guild for almost 10 years.

WILLIHNGANZ: Now (Interrupting) that would be from '72?

BARKER: Early, well actually, I think I started early '71…well '71 through '79…be eight years I guess. Maybe 1980…my memory's not what it used to be……which was a great time. I was thinking on the way up here I've been on the job about a week probably and Carroll Hale…(a potter from Richmond)…came over to see me and was real serious. He said there's two ways you can handle this job. He said the first way, the easy way, is you can show up for the board meetings…keep the fair going once a year…you know a lifetime position if you want it. Or, you can try to make it into a real statewide organization, involve everybody, and he said you'll make everybody mad (laughter). And it will be a lot more work. And obviously, I choose his way. It was, it was already a good organization. It grew dramatically during the nine years we had the second fair. We'd just opened the store in Lexington, The old Guild Gallery. Granted it was growing by leaps and bounds, 20-25% a year. We added a second craft fair in Berea the fall of '75 I think. We hosted the Southeast Regional gathering of the American Crafts Council and brought oh…Sam Maloof and David Leach, people from all over…literally all over the world as instructors, and about 400 people…mostly because I was at a meeting of the American Crafts Council in Atlanta. We mentioned trying to do this, and they said you can't do this. And they said you can't do it--you're not big enough. So we did. We did it just to show them. This was the days before the Crafts Marketing Programs so I approached actually the first……Governor Wendell Ford was still in office and said they were doing a lot of work for you, won't you reimburse us. So, the first funding from the state we ever got was from……Wendell Ford. It really significantly grew under Julian Carroll's administration. Grants directly to the Guilds for programs, work shops, involved in buying a truck. It's all things. When John Y. Brown was elected, picked up the Courier-Journal that morning, and he was really making fun of how the money had been distributed, and he said they funded a crafts fair and I said uh-oh, I'm in trouble. But two weeks later, I think I spoke at Phyllis George's first official function, which was a gathering of legislature wives talking about crafts in Kentucky. And I think everybody knows how Phyllis jumped in and turned that into a wonderful event. But you know, we, the Kentucky Guild was a sort of a high flying active organization during those years, in state, in the region, all over the country really; and if anything happened there for about seven or eight years, we were involved in it. It was up and down and Carroll Hale was right, I mean I made a lot of people mad sometimes. But we, we, …were sort of held up as the model for a state's mark organization at the time. I think we helped get a lot of the other stuff started and then sometimes every now and then one of the grandkids or somebody will ask me why I've got a plaque from the Sorghum Festival in West Liberty hanging on the wall in my office, and I said, "Well, I helped start it." I helped get the Capital Expo in Frankfort going, and I don't know how many more. And one of the great side benefits was being asked to jury…as to serve as a juror for……national, regional organizations, shows, places like Kansas City, Miami, Baltimore, New York--all of which helped me learn a lot more about what was going on everywhere. And, and to draw all those people together. But I think, you know, that,…the fairs we did at Indian Fort Theater in Berea were absolutely the most beautiful, active, happening events anywhere in the country. And that was wonderful as long as it didn't rain (laughter). Even when it

rained, there were……people would still come but, I think when I decided it was over, was the year it rained eleven straight days--including the four days that we were open and my boots rotted (laughter). Instead of our fair bringing in twenty-five or thirty-five thousand dollars for us to operate on for the year, we lost money. And mostly just, just……I was exhausted too. And, my departure wasn't at all that wonderful. There were controversies…I made mistakes. I'm not a great bookkeeper and, …I paid for them. Trying, I can't ever remember, and the worst mistake I made and I give anybody the advice not to do it was I gave six months notice when I was going to leave. And……that makes you a lame duck target for six months (laughter). So, I don't ever recommend that to anybody else and I've never done it again. After I left the Guild, I went to work for an organization…I don't think it exists anymore…was called MATCH, and that initially stood for Marketing Appalachia Through the Church. But they got funding, and we……when they hired me was to do a catalog of crafts…and changed the name to Marketing Appalachia Through Traditional Community Handcrafts. We renovated the old L & N Depot in Berea into offices and warehouse that's just probably what saved the building, and got the broken window cycle broken. But MATCH at one time, had a store in Lexington, one in, …just out of Cincinnati, and one in Berea. And we did probably one of the first color catalogs, retail catalogs ever done. Still I see it popping up on the internet as a collectible, and I wish I had a box of them. But, …we set up a small warehouse, mail order program there and actually we just well…backing up…when I worked in North Carolina, I set up the first wholesale craft warehouse that ever existed. We had so many requests from people who wanted to buy a product. I was trying to coordinate it and I couldn't really make it work, since I didn't touch the stuff…and we set up…we bought a building and set up a warehouse that lasted fifteen or twenty years down the line. So I tried to do the same thing again there in Berea. You…you…it's the same old story. You start trying to warehouse and market crafts in volume, customers want everything to be identical, and in the craft world that doesn't happen a whole lot…so. And we just didn't have the funding to hold on. So, …some states we ran out of grant money to keep going on with that, but not until I'd served six months as the interim manager of the whole Council of the Southern Mountains Bookstore at Berea which was fun. All those years there, you know, I was an English major in college. I always said someday I'm gonna be a writer, and……every job I've been in the writing has been a big part of it……newsletters, press releases, exhibitions, catalogs--all that. Finally, oh…somewhere in the late'70s……I did start writing fiction, there are different things…a lot of magazine work; and then I started writing fiction--getting that published. I think my first book sort of came out…came out in 1983…some during the transition from the Guild through MATCH. I also wrote a book of short stories. It was picked up for publication, and then I found out what I really didn't understand until then, …you can't make a living off a book (laughter). So, I took a job at Morehead University which is close to home. I grew up in Elliott and Fleming counties in their old Appalachian Development Center as the Communications Coordinator. And enjoyed it, it was fun to be back home again. I was trying to sort of get out of craft administration, arts administration, and go into communications. Sort of change gears and do something different, and couldn't. We started the Berea Craft Festival the year before in '82, there in the summer, one July event with the Bellando's and Yosomanic's. I still have that going and then Berea College started calling somewhere along the line early '85. Somewhere along there, wanting me to come back and work at the crafts program there at the college. And I wasn't sure that I could deal with educational institutionalism (laughter). I didn't do too well the first try, but I was also tired of trying to live in two places. So, I think in May of '85, I came back to Berea to run the marketing program for Berea College student crafts program, which was a huge challenge. It had been…uh-

oh…nobody's ever really known exactly why it's there except that it was a good thing to have, so it's been part of the business operation and trying to pay its own way. And Terry Fields was hired as director, I was hired as the marketing manager at the same time and we, we made some tremendous changes. We……probably saved them close to half a million the first year. And just tighten up the operations, and then started hitting gift shows--and did a huge project in mail order with the catalog. At one stage, we were mailing 600,000 catalogs, doing about two million dollars worth of volume, …all at the same size staff. Computers can be wonderful things (laughter). Yeah, we'd…the first year I was there I asked for money to buy a computer system to replace the twenty-one, I think it was, IBM Selectric typewriters, and they said we'll give you money for the computers but we won't give you money to hire anybody to set them up and run them. So, I had one student who was pretty good who helped me for a while and he left. I'd wake up at 3 in the morning wondering, just what in the heck is a DOS Error #43. I still don't know. But I went through about six months of learning how to do the computer part. But it was fun working for Berea College. We did too many trade shows probably, New York, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Chicago. We tried everything that came along. We worked really closely with Phyllis George, with the whole, you know, Crafts Marketing Program grant…everybody in Frankfort. We sold to QVC……hundred and some thousand dollars worth of cutting boards (laughter) one year. Tt was sort of a…we worked so hard we didn't exactly…you'd look up every now and then and see where we were. And it was fun. And, I don't know my title changed ten or twelve times……over the years. They finally……long after I was gone, went ahead and adopted a whole lot of what I suggested years ago; that they admit the crafts are part of the educational program and incorporate them more into the teaching part of it. But I stayed at the college until……'95 or '96, and a new person, new president come in. New ideas, new directions……we were going to have to downsize very dramatically, and I'd already started looking for another job at the time. More in the Appalachian Studies line of work and……wound up having to have back surgery right in the middle of our busy season, from setting up a booth at a show in Louisville. And when I came back I just said it's enough. We're gonna up gonna change directions again and Morehead State University was just in the process of opening Kentucky Folk Art Center in Morehead. Like I said I wanted to go home. So many of the folk artists, 10-12 years ago were older. They were pretty much the same people I worked with when I first went to Asheville in 1965. Self-taught, very independent. I was kind to four or five of 'em probably 'cause my family's been in Elliott County 150-200 years. And it was a chance to go back close to home. I grew up mostly in Fleming County, and I'd never got to live at home since I was 17, so it was my big chance to go back (laughter). Which I did--and it was fun. I learned a whole lot about folk art. One of…one of the things about Kentucky that is different from any place else I've ever consulted or worked is Kentucky's always been open to whatever direction you want to go with your artwork. A lot of craft organizations didn't accept contemporary folk art, which is…tends to be sometimes painted wood or, …you never know what it's gonna be. And here it's always been a matter of whatever you do, bring it on. Let's have fun with it, and……we did get the Folk Art Center finished--actually just getting the building finished, open, getting it funded was a huge project--which I stayed with for seven or eight years. And then, …during this time, I actually spent a couple of years serving on with Tim Glotzbach and Fran Redmon on the board of the……Kentucky School of Craft in Hindman, and the Kentucky Appalachian Artisan Center. So, doing a lot of work helped them get that going. And health problems, I guess, would be what it boiled down to. I got to where I could not any more handle jumping in the truck, driving all over eastern Kentucky or to Asheville, wherever. All along this time when I was at Berea, as soon as I went there, I was elected to the Board of the Southern Highland

Craft Guild where I used to work, and served 2 terms, was president for a year……and…

WILLIHNGANZ: This (interrupting) would have been in the mid '90s?

BARKER: Yeah. Early mid '90s, so it was not at all unusual to get up at four in the morning, make the trip to Asheville for a meeting all day, turn around and drive back that night.

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow.

BARKER: Be somewhere else the next morning at seven, …but I had two artery problems, wound up in the hospital and missed work for about six months. And had to take a physical disability retirement in…end of 2006, I think. And……sort of sat at home trying to recuperate about six or eight months. And……my wife's a journalist; she was a news editor at the Maysville Ledger which was independent at the time. And had worked in the Flemingsburg newspaper before that, and I made a real bad mistake one day. I said, "Gina, I've been sitting here long enough. I need to get out and see some people again." Talking to the gals is fun, but they're limited (laughter). I'm gonna find something to do part of the time, so……I don't know which incarnation of my career this is, but about two months later we wound up owning a small weekly newspaper in Flemingsburg, The Flemingsburg Gazette. Which she's the editor, I'm the free employee, (laughter) the publisher on paper, …janitor. So we thought we knew how to run a newspaper, and …I had to spend a year learning how much I didn't know about all that so. The last year and a half I have not been involved as much in the craft world. I stay in touch with people……my first boss, Bob Gray, passed away last year sometime. I was in touch, visited with him right up until the end. I've, so many of the people I worked with are not with us anymore. I guess that's …what it really boils down to Rudy Osolnik.

WILLIHNGANZ: Tell me a little bit about Rudy?

BARKER: Rudy was a phenomenon. Rudy was…his parents were Austrian and they came to New Mexico to work in the coal mines, or some sort of mine in New Mexico. Rudy, I don't think…Rudy told me his father never spoke any English, and he …was in graduate school (unintelligible) Milwaukee, and said he met somebody from Berea, and they offered him a job, and he came down to visit, and …wound up staying for the rest of his life. He helped…he immediately was active in the Southern Highland Craft Guild which is where I met him, and my first interview for the job was in his office. He was on the board, he set up the craft fair…he also was one of the founders of the Kentucky Guild. He taught full time, he was a full time woodworker, and he was a full time volunteer for craft organizations; and he probably slept an hour or two a week. I'm not sure his house, out on the hill out of Berea, was his refuge……a huge swimming pool one side, woodworking shop on that side, and he probably later in his life was sort of regarded as the premier wood turner…maybe in the world. One of the few, one of the greatest things, we had a work shop one year, and I drove out to Rudy's house on a Sunday morning. He and Sam Maloof and …Mr. Moulthrop from Atlanta, and a young woodworker from Virginia was sitting…we were all sitting there talking, and the young woodworker was sitting there…he's like I'm not sure I'm still alive. I'm sitting in a room with these three people who are the best that ever were, and I'm here listening to 'em. I probably saw Rudy everyday for 30 years. We worked together, we disagreed, we

agreed, we traveled, we did a lot of work……probably during the '70s. Appalachian Regional Commission put a lot of money into the crafts and……headquartered in Asheville Folk Art Center, but they had us do consulting work in Pennsylvania, New Mexico, …all sorts of different places…so we wound up traveling together a lot. Always fun……never any doubt what he thought if you wanted to know what he thought you asked him (laughter). Or if you didn't ask him, he'd tell you anyway. But probably the most influential person in the history of the whole Kentucky craft world would have to be Rudy Osolnik. And……did it all, like I said teaching full time, raising a family, running a gallery, …selling wholesale. I must have been partial to people who made their living doing their artwork and whether it's traditional or contemporary, it never mattered. Like…I kind of like some of the traditional, but that's all become so blurred…it mixes together, but……I think one of the changes is, I helped bring about in Kentucky, was……the trend toward more people actually realizing that they could sell their work and make a living at it. I think when I moved back here in 1970, Homer Ledford might have been the only one, he and the Cornelison's at Bybee Pottery; they were earning their livelihood from making, selling whatever it was they did and now the numbers are incredible it's……and the great thing in that we did here that nobody else was able to pull off, you can do it now without leaving the state unless you don't want to. With the Kentucky Market in Louisville, with the fairs, the shops. One thing we did have going for us……I took over the Kentucky Guild just as we opened the shop in Lexington, The Guild Gallery. And I had to change managers early on which was difficult, but we were lucky and we got the wonderful France Brock, who was there for years. As long as she was there, the shop was profitable, great showcase, great second office. It's…it's like a lot of things. When I was at Berea we opened second, we bought a business, we took over a store in the Civic Center, and did it with no money, no budget, and had it going……wonderfully well until our manager took a job somewhere else. And then small business like that, one person can make all the difference, and I think it was closed sometime after I left. But the…the people over the years are now the most wonderful thing. When I went…my first day on the job in Asheville, I didn't know where Asheville was. I got a map and took my '62 Ford Falcon and headed south, and this was way before interstates. They were starting to build 'em, but I beat the front end out of about two vehicles driving up Highway 25. But I got down there and I went to work, and I said, "Well, what do you want me to do?" And Bob Gray said, and handed me a book and said, "Read this." I said, "I've just spent four years reading books. I don't feel like reading anymore." He said, "You're gonna read this one." And it is called <u>Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands</u> by Allen Eaton. It's the classic book about the region and the crafts. But what was so wonderful in 1965, is a good half the people he wrote about…and this book came out in the '30s…a good half those people were still around. So, I read about 'em the first couple days, and then over the next 6 months, started meeting people like Flynn Douglas, uh…all these others…Sadrack Maystill chair maker. The nine states worth of really traditional crafts people that…that sort of laid the foundation for everything that's going on now.

WILLIHNGANZ: Tell me a little about Homer Ledford.

BARKER: Homer is the most wonderful person to ever lived. The kindest, the gentlest… he, he …grew up in east Tennessee and was not healthy. Of course, if you ever saw him, he was what, 6' 4' and weighed about 80 pounds (laughter). He always joked if he turned sideways he'd disappear. I met Homer at the first craft fair I went to in 1965. I walked in the door and I heard a banjo, and said that sounds like home. So, I headed that way and there was Homer from Winchester. Incredible craftsman,

woodworker……I guess he made most of his money from selling dulcimers, other instruments that he made; some he invented and choose to. He came to Berea for a couple years and went to Eastern, and graduated and taught industrial arts for maybe 10 years, and then just……made his living after that selling his own work; and put together the musical groups and played all over, literally all over the world, just for fun. He never did consider himself as much a musician…he was a good one…but he was more, more of a craftsperson. We, I think the second year I know Homer, we were in Asheville and he had a old fretless banjo. I can't, I'm not a music person, my fingers don't relate to strings, but I wanted that banjo (laughter). And Homer wanted an electric typewriter. I happened to have one of those (laughter) so we traded. I traded him an old electric typewriter for his new banjo, bought a book; it didn't do me a bit of good. About two years later, a neighbor there in Asheville saw the banjo and just went nuts over it, and he kept…he came to the house every day to play the banjo. He finally tried to buy it and I said, "You know what I really need is an electric typewriter". So, I traded the banjo back for a new portable typewriter. So, it went full circle, but……Homer and I crossed paths for forty years. He…he would show up, he and his band, at the Fleming/Mason RECC annual meeting…entertain the crowd or……you'd run into him in Louisville or wherever you happened to go, Homer might just be there and he always was the same person. Unflappable, loving, …he was…he was truly one of the best friends I ever had. And I know, I'm getting old enough to where I keep trying too much or talking too much about best friends. One of the arguments that used to pop up a lot is that the Kentucky Guild was just for craftsmen. The artists were left out…but there were a bunch of artists. The ones we had were good ones, and……recently there was a lot of publicity about Wallace Kelly from Lebanon who passed away in the '80s. And one of his old home movies has been selected to go into the Smithsonian. It's gotten a lot of press and, but Wallace was one of those……classic artists. When I met him he already had white hair and mustache and straw hat, very traditionally did wood cuts……block prints, paintings, and he was just the most wonderful source of advice, …that a young…you know 25 years old, when I first met him. A little impulsive and rash, and Wallace, if I could find him, I'd love to have a…he probably wrote me ten or fifteen big three and four page single spaced letters. After the first one, I asked for them. The first one was volunteered. People, I remember one of his lines…was that he never expected to sell a painting at the crafts fair in Berea, because people wouldn't spend $300 if they didn't have their interior decorator with 'em… (laughter)…which was real perceptive. But we had great crafts people and some great artist. Jim Foose here in Lexington was on the board for years, tremendous recognition (unintelligible) at Berea College. We did one of those early things that you never knew, I think the trademark of the Kentucky Guild, at least when I was there, …we never hesitated to rush in where angels fear to tread. So any thing that came up, we tried it and……Island Creek Coal was building a new office here in Lexington, and somebody from Atlanta came to see me and said is there any art in Kentucky, graphic, you know, flat wall art, sculptures. And we had an old Datsun pickup. We hit the road and I think it must have been the late '70s dollars something in the neighborhood of $16,000 worth of paintings and sculptures (unintelligible) from Jim Foose, Jim Cantrell. I mean just……we gathered stuff, I drove all over the state, gathering things up for them and to this day, I don't know what ever became of that collection when they moved out. It was out on Harrodsburg Road. I know they're no longer there, but I don't know what they did with the artworks. So, we were in one of those early……designer programs, and we actually set up a program trying to do that very same thing on a formal basis. It never worked (laughter). We were never able to go to any architects or interior……design people and talk 'em into it. The ones who did were when they came to us and asked for that help, and what we had with tremendous

knowledge of who did what, where. And that's pretty much……what it was and then……somebody, well the Arts Council gave me an award one of the early service awards and I said, that's when, how do you do all this. I said mostly it's not that I have all these great ideas, it's just every opportunity that pops up I grab it and……I probably don't deserve any credit for thinking of stuff, but we……if it got dangled, we took it and did it. Most of the time it worked, not always. We did the first……decorator's showcase where we went in and actually…student at Berea College and I redid and painted the room and then decorated it. One of those……kind of things but the big misconception…everybody, every job I've ever been in, they call from outside the area and……they want me to load up and bring 'em ten or twelve craftspeople to demonstrate during their one day event…and …no they won't pay or even pay expenses. I said sometimes I think they think I've got like a stable, a barn…you know, I've got a potter and a weaver, which never was quite the case. And it's one of those things where I lobbied for years real hard……most of you don't work for free. Why do you expect the artists to do it? So we've had lots of advocacy, and a lot of work done all across the state along those lines over the last four years, and it sure is a different world now. As far as all that goes, the respect what I saw the first 5 years I worked at North Carolina, was this tremendous professional respect for being a craftsman. And then when I came home to Kentucky, it just it was different. It was crafts were something for housewives. /t was just not considered significant. If you made your living playing with mud or out in the woodshop, that it was more of a hobby or a homemaker's kind of thing. And I didn't do it. I was part of it but I think we totally changed that image the last 35 years. The state deserves a lot of credit. All the arts organizations that have worked so hard have pretty much all had that in mind I think. That was the goal. I know……years ago we had a young potter who was renting the studio space from Churchill Weavers in Berea, and he needed a pickup truck with a camper on it to go to craft shows and deliver stuff, and the bank wouldn't give him a loan because he didn't have a job. So I went to the bank and talked to them and they said if he had orders, firm orders for $2,000 worth of pots then we could loan him $2,000 to buy a truck. So I gave him an order (laughter), I said I don't care if you ever fill it or not. If you do then its fine, we'll pay you, if you don't; you still got your loan. And I think now, you probably could go in and borrow that money on your own. Swaying the business community and the government around the idea of seeing the arts of any kind as a viable profession has been a big project, but I think it's succeeded. I don't think that's an issue any more. Probably somebody asked me……not too long ago of a new board of directors or something or other, and they said, "What's the best experience you've ever had being on a board?" And here in Kentucky, bar none, that has been working with the Kentucky School of Craft, …up in Hindman. We, Dr. Hughes, Ed Hughes, was president of Hazard Community College…called me and he put this group together. We had the first advisory meeting in Lexington, and they're, these are national level people, and before we had the meeting we had during dinner, he said, "What should I expect?" I said, "You know we're all pretty egotistical people, probably the first hour or two we'll all spend telling you how great we are, what all we've done, all this good stuff." I said, "Maybe toward the end, or maybe tomorrow, we'll get around to doing what it is you want." And boy was I wrong. They pretty well said we've got "X" number of dollars and a blank sheet if. If you had this much money and a free hand, how would you design a school craft? And really by the end of the next day, …it was all, it was wonderful. It was set up. We sat there, all of us. We wanted a school to learn skills, learn design, learn some appreciation for the history. We didn't want it to be a formal university where you could go learn how to do something and how to sell it.

WILLIHNGANZ: Now what school was this for?

BARKER: It was for the Kentucky School of Crafts.

WILLIHNGANZ: At Hindman.

BARKER: At Hindman and we had the building, we had the money to build it.

WILLIHNGANZ: What year would that have been?

BARKER: Middle '90s……I'd have to look at something to get the exact date. First, we had to start at the Appalachian Center…Artisan Center there at Hindman and the school came along later. Tim Glotzbach was the director……I don't, at some stage, I said, "Tim you all don't need me on the board anymore, you're doing great." And quit traveling to the meetings. I don't know the status of it now. But the original plan, if anybody ever wants a great plan for the perfect crafts school, we drew it up (laughter).

WILLIHNGANZ: What made it the great plan?

BARKER: It, it was put together by people who had experience and both we had professors that taught art. We had people who ran national craft markets. We had people who had their own businesses. The ones like me who'd been administrators for years trying to help other people sell it. There's always been a problem if you go get a degree in art, fine arts whatever and on the university level, the idea of actually selling your work seemed totally foreign, so you would graduate with your MFA whatever. You can go teach or you could try to make a living selling your work, in which case you had no experience whatsoever in knowing how to price, how to sell it, how to run the business side of it, or you had business. This is one of the problems organizations had during the late '60s, early '70s when there were so many arts organizations being formed, trying to figure out who to hire to run it. You hire an artist and you lose the management experience, you hire a manager who might or might not understand what artists are doing. And I think, probably 20 years ago, 25 years ago, the first time I ever heard the expression trying to herd cats, came during a meeting in Frankfort and somebody asked me about being an arts administrator and I said it's like trying to herd cats. You have to allow for everybody going their own way (laughter), most of the time. And then try to give them a common goal. But well, we started out; we didn't want a college of crafts or university of crafts. We wanted a school because college implied degree levels. We wanted it to be open to people who might not have all the qualifications. People who lived in eastern Kentucky wanted to learn how to be a woodworker so they wouldn't have to go through the normal qualification process. And would have the option…they could come and learn how to be a woodworker. They could come and enroll in the community college and earn an associate's degree, and then go on to UK, or Morehead, or somewhere, if they wanted to. We wanted them to have that flexibility. We wanted them to learn about the business side of it, how to run a studio, how to buy and how to sell, how to keep track of it. And to that effect the Artisan Center there has actually a sort of an incubator space where graduates of the school would move into that space, run their business there with a lot of help.

WILLIHNGANZ: This is the Artisans Center in Hindman?

BARKER: Uh huh. The two are very tied together; actually it's all tied into a huge plan for the whole town which involved a considerable renovation. And that first night, we were saying, "How will we know if we succeed?" And I said, "Ask me in 20 years." The whole goal of Hindman and Knott County had was to create a community of artists where young…either graduates of the school or people from other places would move there, set up their studios, build 'em a house, sort of build them a community of, of artists. And I don't know……the way the state funding levels are right now, how much hope it has of succeeding as we designed it. But…

WILLIHNGANZ: One of the concerns that I see and hear expressed as I do these interviews is the……way in which community support has developed and focused on craft organizations and schools even, and the cooperation or lack of cooperation between various organizations.

BARKER: Unfortunately that's nothing new. It's……it; I don't know how you get around it……or even just different parts of the state. When, when I first took the job as director of Kentucky Guild, the first thing I did was schedule meetings all around the state. I went to Murray, I went to Louisville, northern Kentucky, eastern Kentucky, just tried to meet people and find out what it is they thought it was and what they wanted. And …the cooperation we know worked closely with the Arts Council, with the Southern Highland Guild, the Ohio Designer Craftsmen and all these others. Uh…on a more local level, I think right now particularly more so than it used to be is strangely enough competition for funding and support is so tough that you're asking the same people to support the opera or the craft organization, …the folk art center, …and may not be enough people to go around to actually do all that. You have these wonderful people who are interested in everything and love everything, support everything. But then as one of the, somebody told one of our vice presidents at Morehead, we just tried to them……a grant…donation to help build the Folk Art Center. He said, "Not everybody loves that stuff." (Laughter) Can you get into some of that? I think at least there's communication now between the different organizations or attempts to get that kind of communication that's come through the Arts Council, the Arts Kentucky.

WILLIHNGANZ: Marilyn Moosnick made an interesting point, do you know Marilyn?

BARKER: Oh, I've know Marilyn for years.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah, well she said that it developed differently in Lexington than in Louisville. And in Louisville you got large corporate support, and you got the Fund for the Arts. Huge big dollars. You got the opera, you got the orchestra, you got the Center for the Performing Arts, you got all these different programs going. In Lexington, it came not from the corporations but it came from the artists who formed these organizations like the Guild to basically market their, their things, and get recognition, and so the level of support has been quite different.

BARKER: It is and you know part of the difference is there's nothing you can do about part of Louisville is much bigger corporate center than Lexington is. I know we got much involved……the one label I didn't like when I went took the job in Berea was that it was a Berea Guild. So, we and we set out to spread it out. We got heavily involved in Lexington, and everything was happening. Marie Hochstrasser was president of our board for six years and……I don't know how many trips I made back and forth with her…and I mean it didn't matter if it was the Opera House, or the other art studios

downtown. A lot of that came along after I'd left, but we were involved in a lot in the planning for trying to create some of that communication. I don't know what the difference is……in terms of the support, but corporate support; I don't know where it goes in Lexington.

WILLIHNGANZ: Oh, Marilyn's point is she thinks that basically the corporate, the big corporate dollars in Lexington are focused really on the horse racing industry, and they take people to Hialeah to have parties, but they don't invest locally in the arts.

BARKER: Well and, well, hum, at the risk of, I'll have to leave town when I'm through talking (laughter). I think you going back to part of what I was talking about a while ago when I, you know, respect for the profession. I think the attitude that we ran into years ago in Lexington, and I'm not even going to touch it now, but was that if I'm gonna support art, I want somebody good from Miami or New York or San Francisco. And I think there's money for that, but if you got somebody equally good right here……there's not that willingness to jump in. I don't know if you don't get as much social benefit from it or if you…if you're gonna put that money in there you want to make a bigger splash or exactly what it is always a lot harder to get support and all than it is to bring something in. You read that and you get out in to even smaller communities and you start trying to raise money from businesses and individuals, you…the, the, the Morehead's a small town, and you live there you getting solicited by the hospital, the university, the Folk Art Center, the uh…everybody is out trying to raise money in one little place. It's amazing the do as well as they do, but then here I think, I think, well there's some truth to it. And I'll step on another toe, probably the president's of the University of Kentucky. Hurts…probably it helps because if they bring in so much. It probably hurts because they take so much of the support that otherwise might be available to arts organizations. So it's, it's a touchy situation. I……the university itself does not. Well they sponsor lots of events. I don't know……UK has never taken the leadership role that I know of in the arts, regional programs, statewide programs the way people at Berea and Murray have done over the years…as Morehead has done with the Folk Arts Center. And it may just be the difference in scale. And with the focus on research and…

WILLIHNGANZ: Still, it seems like there's, you know, just a surprising lack of real integration between arts organization, and the Artisans Center goes up and it doesn't seem to have much to do with what's going on in Louisville, and it really should……I mean those should be part of an overall plan or movement.

BARKER: That's a tough nut (laughter).

WILLIHNGANZ: It is, it is a tough nut, which is why I brought it to you.

BARKER: Yeah. Kentucky is a, is a state of small communities and……lots of people blame it on high school basketball. Fleming County hates Mason County and this. And, there's some truth in that probably, way back. One of the most active arts communities in the state is down around Murray and Paducah. Paducah gets all this national attention. Most of Kentucky sees as far away, that who cares what happens down there (laughter) that's not. I, I being from eastern Kentucky, fought really hard in the '60s, '70s to get a lot of the effort, the support, the money into eastern Kentucky. I went so far as to draw a map one year for the Arts Council grants came out, and I……little dots on the map…they're all clustered right here in Lexington and Louisville and there's none over

here except for Appalshop. There's nothing happening in eastern Kentucky. Appleshop might be another good example, uh of…

WILLIHNGANZ: I'm unfamiliar with Appalshop.

BARKER: Appalshop, ooo, it goes way back, it think in the late '60s… in Whitesburg, Kentucky. It's , it started out as a film co-op and they still…they produce a whole lot of movies about Appalachian region, do festivals at radio station. They also are great fundraisers. They get money from the National Endowment for the Arts. They get, you know, the Kentucky Arts Council. They're so good that I think a lot of funding agencies say, "Well, we gave Appalshop this much. Why should I bother with these others?" And they know how to ask for it. The Arts Council has spent a tremendous amount of effort over the last 20 years trying to get out into the smaller communities. Recruit people to apply for money, teach 'em how, help them fill out the application and you'll see it, you could see the results right now. I see much bigger spread. The problem with that bigger spread is you still operate with the same slice of money you start with so now you've spread it out. It's good news, bad news. The good news is we've got a hundred applications; bad news is we still only have enough money to fund ten of 'em. *It*, it's…I don't know…I've been going to Kentucky book fair since 1983, so maybe I know Marilyn Moosnick's been involved in that and maybe some comparisons. I know the first one I went to there in the old library and archives buildings there were maybe fifty authors there. We sold, I think I sold a 150 books and signed (unintelligible) and I was blown away totally. It succeeded. It got bigger and bigger and bigger and, I think we still have the same market pool. It's just 150 people now instead of 50. I think that one of the things that's happened with some of the arts funding. And arts funding is the first thing that gets cut. School systems, locally, state…I don't know, it's awfully hard to convince oh, say the Kentucky House of Representatives or the Senate that there's value to listen to music, draw pictures. It's hard to test it objectively and, and the fact that students who are exposed to the arts almost universally score higher on all the standardized tests doesn't seem to…register with some of…in some of the places.

WILLIHNGANZ: Do you think the swing, sort of, in support away from supporting the arts is basically just a temporary pendulum effect or…?

BARKER: I hope so. I don't know the hardest thing to do is to keep an event or an organization going. People come, used to come to me all the time and said, "Why can't we make the fair in Asheville or the one in Berea like it used to be?" And I said, "Well used to be the craft fair in Berea was the only good one between Cincinnati and Asheville." I mean we were it and we'd draw 16,000 people. Well, heck, we went out and we helped everybody else start a fair. So now there's a pretty good craft fair just about every where, anywhere you want to go. And what we've done is diluted the audience and, and you can generate all this excitement when it's totally new. A new organization and a new event, but I don't know about the when we started the Berea Craft Festival in '82 which was tied into the World's Fair in Knoxville, one of the media people here in Lexington called me and said, "So what else is new, you're gonna have a crafts fair in Berea." (Laughter) Well, it's not I'm gonna have to work on this. It's easier to get an initial response than it is to get an ongoing response. It's a lot easier to raise money for a new program, a new project, a new event than it is to keep it going 5 years later. That's where the hard work comes in…it's, it's a different, it wasn't exactly funding but from a market standpoint when I was at Berea College it was selling. We weren't developing new products or fast enough to keep selling more and more to the same

customers. So basically what I did was go out and I got new customers. So here I, you know, I hit this part of the country and shipped to Japan, France and all. It will work for a while. Those morning talk shows that they used to have on local television.

WILLIHNGANZ: Uh huh.

BARKER: Did a lot for the community in arts.

WILLIHNGANZ: There's still a fair number of those still around, I mean there's no reason we can't use them to promote (unintelligible).

BARKER: I…all my years in promotion, and after I left Fleming County, a few people come and say, "Well you should help them set up and promote this festival or that one." I said, "No. I don't want to get run out of town." But you have to work so far ahead. I keep running into…everybody wants to promote this year and if you really doing a good job, you're promoting next year, and the year after, and all. Everything ought to be on the road and I think sometimes organizations run into that. And then you wear people out. You get that same handful and it's, I'm sure it's true everywhere. I'm on tourism committee and other stuff at home and it's, it's…you have these same handful of people wind up doing the work year in and year out, and they get tired, and they'll start looking for an easier way to do it and…maybe don't put the effort into it that they did at one stage. I know, over the years periodically I would just get frustrated and resign from everything. Chamber of Commerce, school, I'm going to take two years off (laughter). Let me out of here. And then what? Over the years and I'm making, probably making some teachers mad, but craft fairs local events did so much to draw people into the arts because they're not intimating. It…and this always, you know, I'd go speak to these groups and…about coming to one of the fairs in Berea and they'd say, "I don't like art." I'd say "Guarantee you'll find something you like. You'll like the blacksmith, you'll like somebody splitting shingles, you'll like all of it." And inevitably I was right, and you drew all these people in a totally nonintimidating situation and it was a whole lot easier to do. We used to take one whole day and devote it to schools. Of course, schools had gasoline and money and they would send upwards of 3,000 kids. I guess on Friday that was kid's day. You sort of batten down the hatches…

WILLIHNGANZ: For which show did you do this?

BARKER: For the Kentucky Guild Fairs.

WILLIHNGANZ: The Guild Fairs early?

BARKER: I don't know how long we kept doing that. But again you run into the problem with the schools start running into transportation problems, and everybody's budget got so tight.

WILLIHNGANZ: So, you were, you were there after they did the train?

BARKER: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: And then you took over as president and you built up the membership during those years?

BARKER: Quite a bit.

WILLIHNGANZ: Now can you remember any numbers in terms of how many people?

BARKER: I think probably in terms of exhibiting members, I might have to go look at my book (laughter). I'm thinking there were, there were…maybe 150 exhibiting members when I started, and upwards of six or seven hundred.

WILLIHNGANZ: You had 700 exhibiting members? Wow!

BARKER: And I may be wrong, that may be the total membership, cause you can join and not be an exhibiting member. I know there was a huge growth. I don't take any credit for it…the times…this was still…overflow from the '60s when everybody wanted to be a leather worker or a candle maker or a, you know, back to the earth kind of thing. And then we basically…the good market recruited an awful lot of people…when I came back to Berea in1970 the interstate had just been opened and the only craft jobs in town were Churchill Weavers, Berea College, and then (unintelligible) opened one on the interstate. Now I think they say there's forty. Warren Mays who makes the dulcimers and makes furniture came to Berea to a craft fair. He was living in Ohio somewhere and he said, "I'm gonna move here." And that's the way a lot of it happens. But, I put a lot of emphasis on…encouraging people. I spent a lot of time talking and traveling, encouraging people to apply. Of course, any guild, any organization that has that standard process is…opens itself up to all kinds of controversy because, you know, one hundred people apply, we take four. That means we just made ninety-six people incredibly mad. And I know I went to Bowling Green one year and…and to speak to a group. There are like twenty people around a big table at the library. Every one of 'em said, "I'm so and so, you rejected me two years ago." And everybody at the table, and I said, "Why don't you start your own, and sure enough the Southern Kentucky Guild of Arts and Crafts came out that; and some of 'em actually made it into the Guild.

WILLIHNGANZ: I haven't heard of the Southern Kentucky Guild.

BARKER: I'm not sure it still exists. I don't know if you're gonna interview…Ginny Petty or not.

WILLIHNGANZ: I don't believe I'm scheduled at this point.

BARKER: She was part of it back then. She's in Berea now. But, there was all of a sudden a market. When, when I took over the Guild, everybody loved the craft fair but they didn't see it as a place to sell. And I'm like you, why not? And a really good friend, a jeweler from Louisville, she said, "I don't bring my good stuff up to the fair. Got to bring cheap stuff." And I said, "You know, bring your best." I'm gonna start promoting the fact that…you can buy stuff at this fair, and I know I spend a lot of effort into the advertising, the press releases saying you can buy it straight from the person who made it. And they said buying stuff is not a real great (unintelligible), you're gonna charge them to get in and then you're gonna ask them to buy something. I said, "Yeah. It works other places." And I think it started working here. That's still hard to get through. A lot of people think that's a Berea phenomenon--it's not. It happens lots of places. In Kentucky though, it's hard to fight that Berea reputation--the history. Now that the new Artisans' Center there…it, it's hard to…get that kind of reception anywhere else. That history goes back 150 years. It's the main route back north and south. You can do the same show in

Maysville or somewhere and it would not work that way. Both because the traffic's not there, and the reception's not there, the appreciation's not there. Nothing against Maysville, it's just cause those people come to Berea looking for what we had to sell like they come to Morehead looking for folk art. Now that was created, the art was there but the market wasn't, and it…over the years going back to the '30s all through the southern Appalachian region…this big market was created. It…there'd been fusses with historians and…sociologists over the years about…David Whisnant wrote a book about how the missionaries corrupted the craft at places like Berea College. Transformed it from what was local into something that was acceptable worldwide--and it's true. Pretty much from Berea down to Gatlinburg and Asheville, they with some help from the government…from the Rockefeller Foundation…they actually created the Southern Highland Guild. All these programs they'd set up…their own stores, their own quality control, and they made a market for high quality items--just didn't offer anything else.

WILLIHNGANZ: Didn't they actually build on a base of existing art culture that was inherent in the Appalachian culture?

BARKER: It's there but it never had been seen as a way to make money. Until the '30s, late '20s early '30s. Almost everybody's well if you're gonna survive, you had to be a pretty good artisan, I know it's like my granddaddy was a blacksmith, a leather worker, built furniture. He just did it for himself. He didn't do it to sell. I think probably the big quilt explosion, and is the best example of practical. Those early quilts were just to sleep under, but even then you couldn't keep…people like my grandmother from wanting to be creative and do special quilts. And they didn't know it, and they were laughed at if you told them they were doing art; and argued with you that they were not, but they were. So, yeah, it's always been there in the culture. I think one of the things I said when we started working on the…Kentucky School of Crafts, and they wanted a statement about which are the traditional Appalachian crafts. And I said, "You know they're really not any." There is a tradition of doing crafts, working with the hands and using the materials that's here. As far as actual medium or technique, there's not really. Edsel Martin from North Carolina was one of my best friends from the first day I walked in down there in the '60s--dulcimer maker--and he said near as he could tell the dulcimer dated all the way back to the Bible to Nebuchadnezzarr. Cornshuck dolls came from Czechoslavakia. I think we did invent the fiddle. But we had a lot of wood, so we're strong in woodwork, leather, clay. I know at one stage when I was director of the Guild; I think it was Walter Hyleck at Berea College was on the board, he said we want to meet an excellent standard. We want to compare ourselves not to Tennessee or to a national standard. I said, "I don't know what it is." And I know I spent a lot of time looking. Like a year later, made a report and I said, "You know we set the national standards in some areas: our woodworkers, our oak there, whatever you call native, basket makers, corn shuck, that kind of things. We're the best. Some of us are the best in pottery or wood. But you know we actually are setting the national standards in some of these places simply because we've been doing it forever. And in the traditional way, one of the big transition, a lot of families in the mountains, a lot of the people, they were really good at making one thing. And if you said be creative they make the same thing. It was made well, it was handed down through the family and it sold." So they didn't really see any reason to mess with it. And there's not as much of that left anymore…but it wasn't. There were little flashes of creativity everywhere…that I think these…missionaries got a hold of in the late '20s and marketed it. The weaving is the one that's usually cited. The early coverlets were ragged. You had to be able to tear them apart and wash them in the creek and they weren't being made to be sold. So when Berea College started

marketing for 'em, sending them to New England…they came up with a precise loom that would weave them tight. And then they gave them away or you could buy a pattern 50 cents or loom for $5, and they went all over the region spreading them. And it so happened that their patterns…their weaving instructor at the time was Norwegian so we have this tremendous kind of Danish influence on the weaving.

WILLIHNGANZ: How interesting, never heard that story. When did this happen?

BARKER: Late '20s. Well actually, Berea hired this lady in 1902 who was Swedish and…they had started their weaving program 1893. 1902 they hired this lady. We found…Lester Pross found for me, one year when I was at Berea, the gold medals that we had won at the World's Fair in 1902 or 1904 somewhere along in there. They'd been in storage in the art building from somewhere. We got them out long enough to take a picture of them for a magazine cover. But you know the whole idea back then was you swapped coverlets for a college education, and that's how Berea got into it. And then they brought her in and she designed this new…the old looms were half as big as this room and they, took about eighteen people to move one, and they came in, she came in with…a small precise loom and she would go around--went around the region teaching people how to weave, and giving them the pattern. Or Berea College would build you one for 5 bucks.

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow! That was just to promote weavers.

BARKER: Yeah, it was part of that old…thing of helping people help themselves. It was part of that whole missionary spirit. I was in a meeting once when…Charles Counts, the potter, was in Georgia; I think he passed away in Africa. He asked President Hutchins at Berea College why the college had maintained this crafts program all these years even though it costs them money. And Dr. Hutchins kind of blinked and stumbled around and he finally said that because it's a good thing to do. And there were a whole lot of people that did that because it was a good thing to do. The, all the early efforts in the mountains were through sort of institutions. Either schools, or missionary churches, or just community groups…when the Southern Highland Guild was first formed an individual couldn't belong. It was craft centers only, and that didn't last too long, but that was the theory back then, and it defined the community within fifty miles. And you market as a group. Sort of the co-op thing. And…Kentucky had at Pine Mountain, Hindman, Berea, there were a bunch of settlement schools, twenty some settlement schools scattered through the region from Berea on to Asheville… (unintelligible) to start with. I worked; I think it was nine years on a book (laughter), a sequel to Allen Eaton's. Mine's called, The Handcraft Revival in Southern Appalachia 1930-1990. And I never would have finished it except that I'd been threatening to write it for years, and…Loyal Jones at Berea College came to me one day and said you've helped four of my students do term papers, research papers on the craft movement. Said we'll give you $1,000 grant to get you started if you'll agree to write a book. Well, I took the grant and I started and then every year they'd call and say, "How's…what kind of progress are you making?" I'd write another chapter and send it to him real quick. And finally got the thing together…was originally supposed to be published by the University of Kentucky but then I'd changed jobs and went back to work at Berea. They tried to run it through the University anyway; it wound up coming out of the University of Tennessee. But tried to go back and try a lot of just update of what happened since Eaton's book came out.

WILLIHNGANZ: Is it still in print?

BARKER: Yeah, the University of Tennessee press. Should have brought a copy.

WILLIHNGANZ: What's the name of it?

BARKER: The Handicraft Revival in Southern Appalachia. It deals more with organizations and then the huge impact that the federal government had during those '60s, '70s, '80s. The federal government when the war on poverty started…the obvious solution to all these people who came into the region in the mist of the volunteers…was to…make and sell crafts. So there was incredible amounts of money poured into different communities. About every community had a community center and they would quilt and they would sell things…and they had a big impact in Tennessee, West Virginia, and Kentucky--not as much in North Carolina. They already pretty well had it. I know people kept calling me…trying to get me to come to work for these craft organizations '66 or'67, and I said, "I don't have any experience, I've only been here a year." And they said, "Well, that's a year's more experience than anybody else has got." It was kind of new to all of us and the market literally exploded in '67, '66, '67, '68. First year I worked in Asheville our total sales from four stores and two craft fairs was around $400,000, and two years later it was over a million. And I mean, but we got discovered by the national media. We were selling to Brentano's in New York. I think I sold them 60 dulcimers one year, and then…we just had to, you know, we were the actually…I'm not going to even say who said it but it was in a meeting a couple years ago when we were talking about the crafts, and one of the people whose been around for a long time said, "You know if you look back at oh, say from the '60s, early '60s on the one thing about Appalachia that's consistently been reported as a good thing is the whole craft world--the craft movement." You had the Rockefeller lady come in West Virginia and get all the press and Phyllis did it here.

WILLIHNGANZ: When did the Rockefeller lady come in?

BARKER: Sharon Rockefeller…the West Virginia senator's wife. This would have been late '60s early '70s…helped a group called Cabin Quilts get started, which is, to my knowledge, is still going. Cabin Creek, West Virginia, is better known, is where Jerry West grew up but, basketball player, but…I mean she got lots of national press for the West Virginia quilting kinds of projects. And the quilting is, in some communities, always been sort of a co-op thing anyway. A lot of people would come together and quilt on the same piece. How many quilts are a world unto themselves? That whole culture is…unbelievable. It's, the whole idea of making quilts is probably the most sustained artistic effort in the history of the world (laughter). I'm not sure. In Appalachia, it is. Oh, and didn't necessarily have to be a community thing. You didn't have a quilting bee. As a matter of fact, I never say a quilting bee actually happened. I slept under quilt frames for 17 years, waiting for them to fall on me. But…

WILLIHNGANZ: Well, I'm always fascinated by the…intersection between commerce and art, and…you look at the compromises that we make to go from being an individual artist where you create a single piece to…manufacture.

BARKER: And one thing that's, you know, good news/bad news thing about what's happened in Kentucky, is for a long time we worked real hard this big push about go into business, sell wholesale, go to the New York gift show, take lots of orders, and this dates back to the late '60s too. The federal government came in and they find …now I had a real good wood workshop where my brother helps me…they want to give me

$100,000 for us to train twelve more people. The problem is I'm not a manager, I'm a woodworker and you give me all that money and I sign a thing saying I'll employ 'em all at minimum wage, ten-16 weeks. You can't learn how to be a woodworker in sixteen weeks for one thing, and then they funded several agency…small businesses out of business by doing that. We sort of did the same thing here. I don't know how many people over the last twenty-five years have…gotten all excited and they've come to the New York gift show with us. They take all these orders and business explodes and they're riding the top of this crest for two or three years, and then somewhere along the line one morning they wake up and say this is not fun. I got into this because I enjoyed being a weaver or potter and I'm not having any fun any more. And most of them quit or cut back, it can go both ways. Roy Overcast, a potter in Nashville worked for the Arts Council. I ran into him one day and instead of his old Nissan truck he's driving a Mercedes and I said, "What happened Roy?" He said, "Cracker Barrel." He started doing spongeware pottery for Cracker Barrel just cranking it out.

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow.

BARKER: And he told me his annual sales, and I'm like, you can't make that much. He said:"Oh, I've got twelve-fifteen people working." Yeah, it can just happen. In theory, like when the Southern Highland Guild started out they actually expected some of those centers to become commercial businesses. They're a couple of woodworking companies there in Asheville, build commercial furniture who started out as a small family operation. They were members of the Guild and at some stage they voluntarily pulled out because they said we're no longer doing handmade work. What, and then the Churchill's, started Churchill Weavers.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah, how do you determine what's handmade work? Cause I've talked to Richard Bellando about setting up those machines and throwing those shuttles at phenomenal speeds and you know, is that manufacturing or is that art?

BARKER: The Churchill's were rejected by the traditional craft world for years. Where Churchill Weavers finally got accepted into it, well for one thing again the government got into it. When TVA built all the lakes in Tennessee, they also had a mandate to create employment, so they looked at the craft world, and they created Southern Highlanders, Inc., which is a co-op. People bought shares in the stock and they had a shop in the Rockefeller Center in New York, one in Washington, D.C., one on the Virginia Skyline Company. Of course, TVA's funding all this. The Southern Highland Guild would not allow Churchill Weavers to be a member. TVA was happy to have them, and then along about the late '40s, TVA's money was running out and they merged those two organizations which is how Churchill Weavers got into the Guild with the new fangled looms as Churchill used to call 'em. To Churchill Weavers credit, what set them apart for all those years was the quality level. The quality and the materials were well above any other commercial weaving operation that you're gonna see. The probably…the tougher example…I don't know if you're familiar with Stuart and Nye Silver Shop in Asheville, Stewart and I was a jeweler in Asheville in the '20s and he started making this dogwood, initially dogwood jewelry, hammered out of silver with a little, and his partner was a Ralph Morris, and they started a little business there on the edge of Asheville. Stuart and Nye died somewhere along the line. Ralph Morris turned it into a huge business. I have no idea what the volume is now, but they got a room twice as big as this one full of tables and little anvils and little people standing there hammering out patterns that Stuart and Nye designed back in the late '20s. It's a tough

call as to whether that's. When I was on the board of the Southern Highland Guild, we had…I remember looking over policies and it saying that…you can't have more than 25% of the products displayed in your booth that can be commercially produced or manufactured, and I said, "Why are we allowing any?" And they said you put the jewelers all out of business if you eliminated the commercial parts that they use and then…

WILLIHNGANZ: Twenty-five percent of their creation can…

BARKER: Yeah, their product had to be of their own.

WILLIHNGANZ: Of their own…

BARKER: Yeah, their own work. A jeweler. You're not gonna make the earring clasps and a lot of that stuff, but one woodwork carver was carving a hound dog and then make a mold. That process has improved dramatically over the last twenty years, and then he'd cast them out of clay, and…the compromise they finally came up with afterwards…I was even shocked that its happening, is that you had to identify it as reproduction, not as an original, cause I guess a lot of…

WILLIHNGANZ: At what point do you have to identify it as a reproduction?

BARKER: If it is, I guess. That area's getting real vague. The big production pottery studios use mold, or giggers or some enhanced production method. One person can't make that much stuff.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah, Louisville pottery uses stuff like that.

BARKER: And Hadley pottery used to be a member of the Guild. Well, they actually helped start it. And they, I think, pulled themselves out when they realized that they were much more of a commercial operation, more of a manufacturing.

WILLIHNGANZ: Well, that's interesting, I didn't know that.

BARKER: It's real hard to tell where one stops and the other ends. And I worked for years trying to write it down for different organizations, and it's, I think, the definition we had in Asheville as to how, what kind of machinery was allowed. And we, you know…I think we defined it as work made by hand with hand tools, or hand controlled machine tools to the extent that the use of that machine tool does not detract from the final appearance of the product. Best example, I can come up with is the wood, bird carvers; we had two of them there in Asheville. One used hatchets, chopped out a block and then he'd carve it; the other, Edsell Martin, was almost as much an artist with a band saw as he was with a pocket knife. He could take his band saw and you…I would have bought the bird when he got through with the saw, then he'd take his knife and finish it. And, and you question, "Does it really add any value to this piece of art that he used a hatchet or if he used a band saw?"

WILLIHNGANZ: There's that guy on television, the woodworker. I've forgotten what he calls himself, the woodworker, something like that who uses traditional tools from the colonial period and he has a, you know, a little bench thing that he sort of sits on that's a vise. And then he has something like with a fly wheel that he pushed with his foot, that

was a band saw, yeah, I mean it's a band saw just like anybody uses, except it wasn't' electric.

BARKER: Oh, what is the first year we did the Berea Craft Festival? Rudy Osolnik invited his friend with a, I'm gonna mess up the name, I keep wanting to say Bodger, it's like in England the early lathes, you had to, you hooked it to a tree and the whiplash of that tree would turn your block.

WILLIHNGANZ: Really?

BARKER: But again, does that make that chair rung a better rung that if I flipped on an electric switch or is it the skill of my hands controlling that chisel, and it's a question that's been going on at least since 1965. I spent the first winter I worked in Asheville trying to write down guidelines with a lot of help for their whole admissions procedure. Some of the stuff's still being used.

WILLIHNGANZ: Well, wood turners all use electric doing stuff.

BARKER: Oh yeah. Potters mostly use electric wheels.

WILLIHNGANZ: Potter, right.

BARKER: I still go by that definition is: if all the machine does is eliminate the drudgery…I don't object to it. The area where it's hardest to explain is weaving. Course I've never understood why anybody would want to sit there and throw that shuttle back and forth.

WILLIHNGANZ: I can't imagine doing that.

BARKER: I mean, at least, at Churchill you used your feet (laughter). I'm not sure actually that throwing that shuttle back and forth has any artistic value. I might get shot for saying that. But it always seemed like a lot of work for me for what you got out of it.

WILLIHNGANZ: Well, you know I thought that until I was talking to Linda Fifield. I don't know if you know her or not. I'm watching her do beading which I always thought ceased being artistic in the second grade, and…what she does is pretty amazing stuff.

BARKER: It is.

WILLIHNGANZ: It's incredibly repetitive stuff that she could sit day after day after day after, and do over and over.

BARKER: And I think there's some areas that that's…you've got to like to be in, to doing that repetition.

WILLIHNGANZ: Oh yeah. You really have to…

BARKER: And you just mentioned the other thing. You know, you think you outgrow the second grade. Ever time in the craft world, and I've been in it, I was in it for 40 years. That you sit down and you try to put in writing what is and is not a craft, and you say we will not accept crochet…well if the right person crochets, it's art. We will not accept

painted objects, at the next meeting they accept this lady from Knoxville that paints creek stones because she's a great artist and she just happens to paint on creek stones. You know, 99% of that stuff is junk, but you get this artist who…so now I'm…the way I once looked at it. You don't exclude anything because the right person gets their hands on it, it's gonna become art whether you approve of the…of it or not. Now I'm not real sure if anybody's ever gone and glued corn to a board and make a rooster that's gonna convince me that it's art.

WILLIHNGANZ: Well, I think you haven't seen the right stuff. I've seen some corn art that I thought was stunning.

BARKER: Okay, but that' my whole point, it's just …

WILLIHNGANZ: But you're right. Things that you don't think…my wife and I recently bought our first and only piece of marquetry which is basically a piece of wood cut together. And, you know, I've seen these kits and things that I've always thought, "This is ridiculous, this is like paint by number stuff." Then this guy, when it's done right, it's stunning.

BARKER: I worked with a man, a Mr. Bater, William Bater in Asheville, who had…was German. And he grew up apprenticed to a maquetry artist, and I don't even know where you can find a piece of his anymore. Probably in museums…and it was incredible. Now I haven't seen anybody as good as him since then, but you would have had to have a lifetime involvement in it to ever do what he did. He did this mountain landscape…little detail so small that…I don't have the patience or the eyesight to be a really good person for all that. My, my…everybody, always the first question I get everywhere is what craft or art do you do and I didn't, I just appreciate and market them (laughter). I was an art major for maybe a month, and again I'm one of those people who don't know when to stop. So I'll fix…I'll have a real good thing going. Then I'll mess it up somewhere down the road even if it's carving a bar of soap. So, so I've never really gotten into, oh…I used to like doing some woodworking, but…I'm more of a carpenter or was…than I was a woodworker.

WILLIHNGANZ: But, you facilitated people being able to…

BARKER: Facilitated a lot and…oh, about 6 months ago, I ran into a chair maker I'd known for years and he said, "Hey, when you gonna come back and help us out?" And I said, "I spent 40 years going around Kentucky and the region thinking I was teaching people how to market their work, and run a business, and…a lot of people blame me for the fact that they're in business (laughter). But I said, "You know, I'd never really owned one and…in October, we'll have owned the newspaper for two years." I said, "Now you need me to come back and teach you a business workshop. Now that I really know."

WILLIHNGANZ: What's the difference? What would you teach them now? Hold on a second, plane go by here it's gonna record my sound. That's what I need somebody (unintelligible) …

BARKER: Now, I would teach them that if you don't have the business skills to match the creative skills, you're probably wasting your time and you're not gonna last. I never had to really deal with the, I mean all the laws and the rules and the tax withholding things. And I knew it was there, but I never had to do it. And always we had, you know,

we had when I worked at the college, we had bookkeeping department did all that. And if I needed to buy something I'd call the purchasing office. And if I had to pay a bill, I'd call the accounting office. I'm all those now. And …

WILLIHNGANZ: The Guild actually originated workshops in business procedures?

BARKER: It did, and we started that when I was there…we did some of it. We tried to do a series of workshops every year, and I insisted that if we did three, and we did them different in Berea than we did them in Bardstown, so one of the three has to deal with business. And…I think the first year, of course, this is a whole different era, printing was a big problem back then. This is, it sounds ridiculous now, but I had a printer come up from the University of Tennessee Press, and designer who it was good working with…just he was both an artist and a technician. He could bridge the gap there…come and teach people how to get a business card printed. And we were really shocked how many people didn't know, or what went into it, and how little they knew about the whole printing process. But, yeah, they're doing, they're going at it on a much bigger scale now with booth design, product development, pricing. But the first annual meeting I went to of the Southern Highland Craft Guild, one of the speakers…who came, was on how to price your work. I'm trying to remember…what was his name? Shell, whose a print maker from New England somewhere and everybody I, that's the hardest part of…of the business side of…if your making things and selling them is, you can try to figure out all that what it cost you. Honey, if you're printing a newspaper…and your bank account comes up $10,000 short, it probably costs you $10,000 more to do it than we took in, and that's a good sign you need to do something (laughter) or is. When Jim Cantrell used to do pottery, we'd sort of eyeball it and price it and I don't, I know everybody had a theory that he'd sort of look at it and if you've been in business a while, you'd say that's $25. If it sells too fast, it's priced too cheap, so you raise it up to 30 or keep raising it until it stops. Or if it won't sell, you keep lowering it until its starts. But there's better ways of doing it than that. And in the art world it'll bring what you can get for it, and one of the…unfortunately a lot of people have a hard time learning that. People used to come in and they'd say why, you know, Rudy Osolnik gets $300 for a little bowl like that. I said in 40 or 50 years, if you're a famous as he is, you can too. And they'd say, "Mine's just as good." And I said, "Might be in 40 or 50 years. Come back and you'll be able to get the same prices he got." But it, it, it's this in the art world, selling art work is this horrible combination of technical, creativity, and then your image has to be. If nobody knows how you are…you're gonna have a hard time selling. If you've done a good job of selling yourself, which is hard to do. And I know we did a lot of work on that over the years of trying to help people present package, the more people know about you, the more likely they are to buy that piece. For God's sake, when you go to a show, don't hide behind the booth. You've got to sit out there and talk to them whether you feel like it or not, or hire somebody to do it. You know, it, you have to be all these different things, and then…we've had that running battle over the years with the wholesale. Do you sell wholesale or do you sell retail? And to me, it all depends on your personality. If you don't like dealing with people, and if you're honest, totally honest, you better not get out there in the public because (laughter) somebody will come by and make a stupid comment about your work and you'll chew them out. If you don't like dealing with 'em, you're better off selling wholesale to other stores. If you like people, well then you can come to a nice compromise there. And unlike most people in organizations, I've been a big encourager of people selling from their studio. A lot of organizations didn't want people to do that because they figured it was competition themselves. And I said, "Yeah, whoever does the best job will get the business anyway." And…I think, you

know…the probably…like Sarah Culbreth and Jeff of Tater Knob in Berea have a good combination. They've got their studio. It's open to the public with a shop. They do a select handful of shows a year. They sell wholesale to a handful of selected…businesses, and the way it was described to me forty-five years ago, forty-some years ago, was…a price person has to have a production line that pays the bills. You know, there's stuff if you're good at making mugs and they sell good, spend a week throwing mugs make 200 of them. When you sell all them you'll have the electricity paid for and the groceries bought. Then you can do art. You can do what you want to do. And which might sell and it might not sell, it might set there five years, or it might be the first thing you sell the next show you go to. But there's a certain…it would be nice…to be able to do nothing except what you wanted to. I can almost relate to it from the writing world, where when I first started writing…you know, I had writer's markup. I went to a workshop. All this, and I'm trying to write what this publication was, what that one was. I write your brochures for you, I write your catalog for you, just trying to get it to where I'd have some time to write fiction (laughter).

WILLIHNGANZ: I understand, yeah, there's a real conflict. There's so many different strategies that I hear. There are guys who have a day job, and then they do their creative work, and they sell what they can. There are other people who've told me…the artists have told me, it's really a phase in the career. So you start out and you do anything you can to sell, and then as your reputation gets in and you get enough work out there you start to build an audience for your work, then you can start to focus more and more. Somebody said, "You know, I don't bother by going to shows because I can't afford the travel, and I don't want the time setting up a booth and getting everything organized, and then knocking it down three days later and taking it home. It's just too crazy and…

BARKER: And it's a personality thing too. If somebody told me I had to go back to a New York Gift Show and set up a booth--sit there for six days, twelve hours a day, and then tear it all down, pack it up and ship it all home, I think I'd just be (unintelligible). I don't ever want to do that again.

WILLIHNGANZ: I understand, I understand.

BARKER: But it's, it's like at a certain stage and it may come, well, it doesn't come too late either. Rudy Osolnik wasn't really all that well known nationally and internationally until he was passed his 65 and he worked another twenty years. So the recognition can come some time though. With me, the writing world, I think well now…that now that it's sort of here I think what difference does it make?

WILLIHNGANZ: Now, that's my plan. I'm 62, I got three years to get discovered and then twenty years to work.

BARKER: Yeah, it is, it's like…I had a call…two days ago from Mitchell Tolle in Berea. The artist there whose a very good friend of mine, whose had to change some of my opinions about arts marketing, but…actually what he called about was he wanted to know if I'd still write some copy for him and I said, "If it were anybody else, the answer's no, but for you yeah, I'll do it." But Mitchell, a lot of artists don't like him because he's so financially successful and he sells a lot of prints. And he and I had this running argument since he was 20 years old, twenty-one years old, when he first came to Berea. We wouldn't let him sell his massed produced offset prints at the fairs. My first book

came out, I don't know where he found it but Mitchell came, popped through the door carrying that book. Grinning ear to ear, and he said what if this was the only copy of this book you could sell. I said, "I know what you're getting at, I understand."

WILLIHNGANZ: How funny.

BARKER: Oh, it was. But it is, and it's always a…some organizations have gotten so wrapped up in dealing with those issues that they've kind of forget, they get so wrapped up in policy and that kind of stuff that they forget what it is they're there to do. Which is to, when…Rudy Osolnik and Richard Bellando called me and they wanted to start the Berea Craft Festival, I went to meet with them at breakfast one day and here you'd think that this thing is not an organization. I mean we owned it, …and I said, "What, what do you want?" And I said, "Yeah I want everybody to have fun. I'm tired of these deadly serious things. I want an event where, I want the exhibitors to come, have fun, and make money. Usually they're tied together. I don't want it to be…too complicated, let's have music, let's have a party." And we did, which is, I think the ultimate. That's what the whole group of us had learned from however many years it had been, going to fairs in Asheville and Berea, in Louisville and Cincinnati. If you're having fun and you're selling something, three or four days are not nearly as long…so you can…and I think that's where the early Guild fairs had the advantage over everybody. People would start showing up from all over the country a week before. Of course, this was in the days, a little bit of the hippie days left over. I think half of them were, or how they heard about it. They just came drifting in and they'd stay with somebody, or sleep in the woods, and it was just a happening…and it sort of…had that personality all its own and pretty much went its own way. I'm not sure anybody could have controlled it. But I miss; I miss that sometime now with the professionalism that we worked so hard to get. We worked so hard to become professionals that we forget to have fun sometimes.

WILLIHNGANZ: Well, a lot of fun talking with you and I think we probably should call it a day.