

Suburban Life

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Gift for living

These award winners perfected the art of giving

By Louise Okrutsky
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ARTIST. The word invites images of people living the Bohemian life or starving in the proverbial garret. But not to the Farmington Area Arts Commission. For its members, the word brings to mind people who not only live creatively but share their gifts with others.

As it has since 1976, the Farmington Area Arts Commission will give special recognition to people who've enriched the community simply by sharing their interest in art and music. The group will present three awards during a reception at 4 p.m. Sunday in the Farmington Community Center.

The winners' circle includes people who've quietly but persistently followed their interest in art. Larry Hayden of Farmington Hills, chosen as the 1986 Artist in Residence, began his career as a commercial artist. After 26 years of illustrating car brochures and travel folders, he quit in 1979 to devote his time to painting waterfowl and carving decoys.

ANOTHER WINNER who began his career as a commercial artist, John Davenport traded in a successful but financially unreliable career for a teaching post at Oakland Community College.

He discovered that guiding the development of a student's artistic ability could be a creative act. His interest in his students' progress and his support of the campus sketch club he helped start have twice earned him the FAAC's Service to the Arts Award.

School children and adults have been entertained for 20 years by the Farmington Musicales's programs. The group's long-term commitment to bringing its music to its audience prompted the FAAC to give the Musicales the Service to the Arts Organization Award.

For Hayden, the Artist in Residence award is one of many he's won for his work carving duck decoys and for his limited edition prints of wildfowl. He executed the first Wildlife Legislative Fund of America painting of the year in 1983. The California Waterfowl Association commended him by choosing his work as its print of the year in 1986. His work is on exhibit in museums of natural history in Denver and Los Angeles.

But the local award holds special value for him.

"I was real pleased to have won it — to be recognized in the community where you live," he said. Hayden has lived in Farmington Hills for 22 years.

His fascination with carving decoys and painting waterfowl began long before he could devote his energy to it full time.

"I don't know why it appealed to me. I was 22 or so at the time. I wasn't a duck hunter at the time. And I saw a decoy on a shelf. There was something about them that just appealed to me. I had some friends who were duck hunters and I went with them. Not so much to go duck hunting, just to see how (the decoys) were used."

HE BEGAN carving decoys in his free time.

"I entered a lot of shows and built up a reputation for carving." His next step was to start turning out limited-edition prints that

show off the ducks with a minimum of background. Eventually he became involved in designing state duck stamps. His duck stamps were selected twice by Michigan and once by Nevada, Texas and Arkansas.

He seems to be happy with his success but not complacent about it. "Usually you're never satisfied. You're always trying to prove something."

He quit his job as a commercial artist seven years ago after he'd built up a following for his waterfowl prints.

"I thought I'd have all kinds of time when I quit the studio," he said, lighting up a cigarette. "I used to go hunting and fishing a lot. Some years I don't go at all now. I go out of state a lot, to Texas but they're field trips to get reference material for the paintings."

A corner of his studio in the back of his home is filled with photos he's taken of waterfowl resting, taking off or in full flight. Indeed, he's surrounded by images of ducks, from the various aspects of his work, to the designs on the welcome mat in his studio, to the duck pattern on the ribbon of the wreath hanging on his front door.

"I'm real lucky to be in this position," he said.

THAT STATEMENT could have been made by another of this year's award winners, John Davenport. After 18 years working on commission as a commercial artist, he switched to teaching when he began to worry about helping his four children through college. Not was OCC new to the area, Davenport was new to teaching.

"It was kind of a new world for me." After that first year of teaching, the commercial art business was booming again and his old studio called him. He declined to return.

"It was the smartest choice in my career. I told them, 'I've found a new life here.'"

Eight years ago, after he switched from teaching fine arts to commercial art, he began to act as faculty sponsor for an informal sketch group that still meets two Saturdays a month at Orchard Ridge. After he changed departments, he couldn't teach fine arts but agreed when students asked if he'd sponsor a sketching session with a model.

One-quarter of the club's members are students, the rest are people who live in the area including members of the Farmington Art Club.

"There's so much of a need I think for people to have the opportunity to draw and sketch. If I didn't sponsor it, the students would have to pay to rent the room. The rewards and the appreciation make it worthwhile. Sometimes a thank you is worth more than money."

THE AWARD is part of Davenport's own farewell to teaching. He retires at the end of June to spend time with his wife, to travel and to pursue a new artistic interest, mosaics.

For a man who majored in printmaking at the Franklin School of Professional Art in New York, mosaics are another challenge.

"I became interested in them through ancient Greek and Roman mosaics. For the last 1½ years, I've forced myself to get the discipline of doing art work before retiring. You have to work into this retirement business slowly. You have to build up a schedule for yourself."

That schedule will include time for commissions he receives for his work. "It seems I have to turn down more than I do," he said, slowly smiling.

Its 88 local members have performed recently at 12 Oaks Mall as well as putting in a total of 54 hours entertaining patients in hospitals. They're planning to participate in Michigan's sesquicentennial next year.

"Nowhere else I know can you get this quality of music on this basis," said Rosalind Lewis, the group's president.

White Lewis says her ability limits her to the group's chorus and to occasional public piano duets with

her daughter, she probably reflects some of the qualities that the FAAC saw when they gave the Musicales its service award.

It's comprised of friends and neighbors interested enough in music to want to bring it into the lives of others.

"I love the people. They're very friendly. They're dedicated musicians," Lewis said.

IN ITS 20 years in the Farming-



Larry Hayden, named Artist in Residence for 1986, turned a fascination for duck decoys into a successful career.

"There's so much of a need I think for people to have the opportunity to draw and sketch. If I didn't sponsor (Art-on-the-Ridge), the students would have to pay to rent the room. The rewards and the appreciation make it worthwhile. Sometimes a thank you is worth more than money."

— John A. Davenport
Service to the Arts Award
winner

Staff photos by Randy Borst



Rosalind Lewis, president of the Farmington Musicales, will accept the award for the group which received the Farmington Area Arts Commission Service to the Arts Organization Award.

John Davenport winds up his career at Oakland Community College Orchard Ridge campus with his second Service to the Arts award. He was nominated for both awards by members of Art-on-the-Ridge, a sketch club he sponsors. Davenport retires from OCC at the end of this semester.

