

CONVERSATIONS



FRANK PROVENZANO

Lessons of life: People behind the stories in '98

Over the past year, I've met some of the most intriguing people who've generously shared their time, talent and vision.

Writing about them could hardly be called a "job." Rather, getting to know these people has been a study in courage, wit and wisdom.

Here's an incomplete list of the inspirational people of 1998 whose stories appeared in the Arts section:

- Marshall Fredericks
- Stewart Francke
- Sonia Nothman
- Nick Serkainian
- Linda Brown
- Helen Febbo & Joseph Bernard
- Phyllis Meer & Mark Freed

Touched by greatness

In mid-February, two months before he died at 90, legendary sculptor Marshall Fredericks was struggling to



To remember: Nick Serkainian's "Armenian Radio Hour" celebrates his ancestors' culture, and beseeches listeners not to forget the travesty of war.



Herold: Songwriter Stewart Francke translated his popularity into helping those who cannot afford bone-marrow transplants.

travel from his Birmingham home to his studio along Woodward Avenue in Royal Oak.

With the help of an aide, he walked through a studio filled with replicas of his famous public sculptures.

Slowly, he approached his towering sculpture of "Lord Byron." To the uncritical eye, the work was a masterpiece of the mythic meeting the romantic.

Throughout his life, Fredericks returned to rework the piece. He was never quite convinced that he had finished the mammoth work.

Art, as Fredericks' life teaches, is a never-ending process, a continual search for wisdom amid a world of flux.

A song to write

For years, no local rock/pop musician worked harder than Stewart Francke. He wrote, sang and produced his own CDs, appearing to sing for a few people at local book stores, and before sold-out audiences at big-time venues like The Palace.

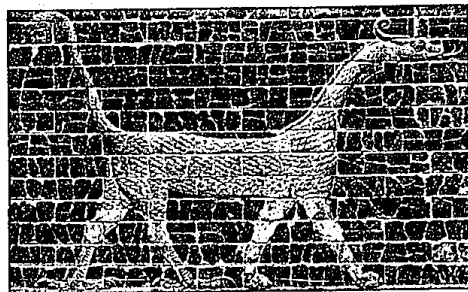
In June, however, his life turned into one, long "ER" episode when he was diagnosed with leukemia.

Rather than withdraw, Francke and his sister, Kit, established a foundation to help raise money for those who couldn't afford a bone marrow transplant.

A few months after receiving an

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The Best of '98



Beastly Delights: This dragon (c. 604-563 b.c.) is one of the animals on exhibit through Jan. 31 at the Detroit Institute of Arts.

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN AND
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STAFF WRITERS

We live in a world of lists. To-do lists. Best-sellers' lists. Endless enumerations of popular opinions. All in all, a dizzying compilation of stuff.

Hopefully, the following list won't induce vertigo. And maybe, just maybe, it'll put some perspective on the people and events that distinguished the past year.

Here's hoping.

Indelible impressions

Best museum exhibits: "Monet at Vetheuil: The Turning Point" at the University of Michigan Museum of Art; "The Invisible Made Visible: Angels from the Vatican" at the DIA; "And I Still See Their Faces" at the Jewish Community Center; "Juke Joint" and "Detroit's Black Bottom" at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History.

Best gallery exhibits: "Martin A. Maddox: A Memorial Exhibit" at the Kidd Gallery; "Detachable Music for a Collapsible Culture" at the Detroit Artists Market; paintings of Lui Liu at Galerie Blu; "New Paintings by William Glen Crooks" at David Klein Gallery; "Street Scenes: New Paintings by Stephen Magasi" at Lemberg Gallery; "Book Works" by Donald Lipsky at Hill Gallery; and, "Jeffrey Abt: Paintings and Drawings" at the Cary Gallery.

Best new/expanded museum: Cranbrook's expansive Institute of Science, including new permanent exhibits.

Best art festivals: First annual "Arts, Beats & Eats" in downtown Pontiac; Ann Arbor Art Fairs; and, "Art & Apples," presented by Point Creek Center for the Arts.

Best invitational exhibit: Habitat Galleries' International Glass Exhibit featuring 65 leading artists.

Best expression of love in a gallery: Artist Terry Lee Dill's video testimonial of his eternal affection for his fiancée, Diane Rock Smith.

Best community dance production: Plymouth Canton Ballet Company's "Dracula."

Best fine arts competitions: BBAC's Michigan Fine Arts Competition; Canton Project Arts Fine Arts Competition, and, Art in the Village sponsored

by the Livonia Arts Commission.

Best art exhibits for kids: "Beastly Delights" at the DIA; and, ongoing exhibits at Elizabeth Stone Gallery in Birmingham.

Best emerging art community: Plymouth's Old Village.

Best art created on site: Plymouth International Ice Sculpture Spectacular. The 17th annual event takes place Jan. 13-18.

Best art created for a corporate setting: The swirling stainless-steel sculpture, "Eco," by Joseph Wessner of Birmingham.

The sculpture stands inside the Delphi building in Troy.

Overdue recognition

Best contemporary arts museum that's not officially called a contemporary arts museum: Cranbrook Arts Museum.

Its time Director Gregory Wittkopp, and Assistant Curator Irene Hofmann got the credit they deserve for their gutsy pursuit of provocative contemporary art exhibits.

Best literary undertaking: Author/funeral director Thomas Lynch of Milford, whose recent book of poetry, "Still Life in Milford," reveals a literary artist in control of irony, metaphor and meter.



Historical setting: Livonia Arts Commission president Bob Sheridan displays some of the work in "Art in the Village," held at Greenmead Historical Village in June. It was one of the Best Fine Arts Competitions in 1998.



A jewel: Developer Chuck Forbes' bold decision to move The Gem Theatre saved the historic building from the wrecking ball.

Best local

literary jour-

nal: "Wit-

ness," edited

by Peter Stine

and published

by Oakland

Community

College. A

compendium

of poems,

essays and

short stories

by national

writers

inspired by

social issues.

Best origi-

nal composi-

tion by a local

composer:

"Tuskegee Air-

men Suite" by

Brian Belanger

of Royal Oak,

performed by

the Birming-

ham Bloom-

field Symphony

Orchestra.

Pioneer Awards

Best conversation about the arts: (OK, OK,

this might sound self-serving.) The quarterly

roundtable discussions on the arts sponsored by

the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

Best efforts to build dance scene: MOT's

partnership with the American Ballet Theatre to

make the Detroit Opera House the midwest home

for the legendary ballet company.

Outstanding performances by the Eisenhower

Dance Ensemble, and Detroit Dance Collective.

Best progress by an annual art fair: The

West Bloomfield Art Festival, which featured 200

artists from around the U.S.

June's fair demonstrated the effectiveness of the

chamber of commerce partnering with one of the

area's biggest corporations, Henry Ford Medical

Center, to promote the arts.

Please see BEST, C2

MUSIC

Trumpeter/actor returns home to play

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
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Todd Curtis' life is like a soap opera. Just when he seemed headed for success in the 1970s and 1980s, Curtis' career as a soap star was nearly cut short by an auto accident that left the Livonia native with serious facial injuries.

At the time, Curtis was playing a rich playboy named Jordy Clegg on "Capitol." Undaunted, Curtis, and the producers, simply wrote the 1986 accident into the script after his release from the hospital.

Playing trumpet again wasn't as simple. Curtis was once a promising musician who'd perfected his skills at Boston University's Tanglewood Institute. The facial injuries Curtis sustained when he went through the windshield, more than likely, would prevent him from ever blowing a note again.

That was one of the hardest pills for Curtis to swallow. Before he'd won the

part on "Capitol," Curtis played with the Westside Jazz Ensemble while taking acting classes in California. After the accident, "any thoughts of trumpet were put on the shelf," however the emotional pain was tempered by the fact that Curtis had resumed his acting career.

Curtis couldn't have worried about a five-year run. Before long, producers of the "Young and the Restless" hired him to play Skip Evans, a photographer. Parts in action films such as "American Tigger," "Night Eyes 3" and "Out for Blood" followed his five years on the "Young and the Restless."

It was while filming "Clint of Command" in Israel that Curtis decided to visit his sister Heidi Hepler, who had moved to Rome in the early 1990s. The trip triggered a renewed interest in trumpet. Hepler, a vocalist, is half of a duo with husband Michele (McKELLY) Rama.

Apprehensive to find out if he could still play, Cur-



Family affair: Todd Curtis (left) joins sister Heidi Hepler and brother-in-law Michele Rama (above) for their rare mix of music.

tis finally picked up the trumpet again last year but told no one, not even his sister.

"It was the scariest thing that ever happened, nothing came out," said Curtis, "but trumpet is a different form of expression and I missed it. The last time I played was on 'Capitol.' I wrote a fantasy for the show. It was really a lot of fun."

Curtis didn't give up on his playing though. Gradually, his technique came back with daily practice. In June of this year, Curtis sent Heidi a tape of his

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