

A connection with clay

Artists at the annual Clayfolk Pottery Show share a lifelong love and fascination with their medium

Something primal occurs when children first sink their little hands into a ball of clay. A connection to the medium and the possibilities within the clay is realized; their imaginations are the only limits. Some children develop a lifelong love affair with clay and in Southern Oregon we call those individuals Clayfolk.

By **CHELSEA FINE**
for the
Mail Tribune

The 125 members of Clayfolk are busy once again this autumn as they prepare to present the 31st Annual Clayfolk Pottery Show and Sale, Friday through Sunday, Oct. 27-29, at the Medford Armory, 1701 S. Pacific Highway. Sixty of the region's best ceramic artists will be exhibiting and selling their work to the public.

The founding members of Clayfolk began assembling in 1976 out of a grassroots need to share ideas and information; over many potluck dinners, they formed the premier nonprofit organization for ceramic artists in the Rogue Valley and the first club for clay enthusiasts in the state of Oregon.

The now-famous show and sale formed out of the need for artists to sell their wares before the holidays, and after many venue changes, the Clayfolk show has found a comfortable home at the Medford Armory for the second year.

Ceramic artist and six-year Clayfolk member Julia Janeway says she is very happy with the increased turnout now that the show

has settled in at the armory.

"It's a great chance to see a lot of artists and a wonderful chance to Christmas shop," says Janeway. "I think a major benefit of the Clayfolk show is that the artists get to meet the people who buy the work and hear their stories. I really enjoy that personal aspect; it's another way to connect to the community."

Janeway creates mainly what she calls functional ware from her Ashland studio. She uses a technique called slip carving and then draws on her pieces, often integrating images of animals. "We have over 3,000 people on our mailing list. The Clayfolk show has really gained in popularity," says Janeway.

Animals are a common theme among clay artists in the region. As you enter nine-year Clayfolk member Penelope Dews' studio, stacks of bowls and mugs ready for the show await the kiln. Small figures of horses, dogs and bears peer at you from atop shelves while others are affixed to large vases.

A pair of very satisfied-looking llamas emerge out of a massive pot overseeing the processes of an artist who discovered her fascination with clay at the age of 3. Dews says she believes the Clayfolk show is a wonderful showcase opportunity for local artists.

"You might encounter a ceramic artist that you didn't know was an artist. We pass people daily and have neighbors who create pottery that we don't know and the show is a great

way to discover them," says Dews. She says she also believes the show is great for established artists to continue to evolve their work and for new artists to get that first exposure.

Art and Barb Linnemeyer began showing their ceramic pieces more than 10 years ago as members of Clayfolk. The couple have been working in clay for more than 35 years from their Selma studio and have found a niche creating functional and sculptural pieces with a popular oxide leaf shadow glaze that creates iridescent and rust colors.

They have also passed down their love of clay working to their children, all of whom are ceramicists. Two even have their own booths at the Clayfolk show now.

"We all share a studio space when they are in town. At least a couple of days a week we are all working together," says Barb Linnemeyer. "Clayfolk is a



A finished piece by Jim Keith is ready for the show.

wonderful group of people to work with. Everyone struggles with the same artistic problems and it's nice to get together and share solutions," she says.

"It's a lot of hard work to put this show together but it has become really successful," adds Art Linnemeyer. "Southern Oregon has really responded and it gets bigger every



Photo by Chelsea Fine

Penelope Dews puts the finishing touches on a piece for the annual Clayfolk Pottery Show.