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A Historical Review of the AENJ Distinguished Fellow Recognition

By: Rick Lasher

As we prepare to go to Baltimore to attend the latest NAEA convention I think of the impact that the national leadership has had on state organizations. The AENJ Distinguished Fellow Designation is modeled after the NAEA Fellows and I thought this would be an appropriate time to write down an historical review of the AENJ Distinguished Fellows.

AENJ honors service, leadership and dedication to its goals and to the visual art profession with the Distinguished Achievement Award. This is awarded to members who have dedicated leadership service to AENJ, usually as conference chairs and officers of the organization.

In 1995 AENJ explored the possibility of establishing a Distinguished Fellows Award category to additionally recognize the small number of members with continued long time leadership and active participation in AENJ.

An AENJ Distinguished Fellow is a member of the association whose long- term dedication to the visual art profession and to AENJ goals, through leadership and teaching experiences is recognized as exemplary.

At the time that the AENJ Distinguished Fellow award was established NAEA, the Ohio and Pennsylvania Art Education Associations each recognized members of their organizations as Distinguished Fellows. The development of the AENJ criteria for AENJ Distinguished Fellows was based on our review of their policies.

The charter Fellows members were selected by the AENJ Executive Board in 1995. They are: George DiBouno, Rick Lasher, David Mackey, Gloria Pappalardo and Elaine Raichle.

The group selected Elaine Raichle as its first chair. Her strong connection with the New Jersey Department of Education led to our being responsible for the student and art educator/artist's display in their boardroom in Trenton. (The art educator/artist participation was canceled several years ago by the department of education.)

This display happened because the department was housed in a new building, which Elaine found to be very barren when she attended New Jersey School for the Arts board meetings.

She was also the impetus for AENJ to possibly provide a sculpture, by a New Jersey artist, for the building lobby. Her original idea was that AENJ immediately proceed to purchase a sculpture. AENJ did not have funds to accomplish this, at that time, but they agreed with the philosophy behind the idea. This led to the establishment of an account in which an annual stipend is placed in order that money accrue to an amount which would allow the eventual purchase to be made. The Fellows serve as an advisory body to the AENJ Board.

At some point it was decided to increase the original five members to seven and the category of "Emeritus" was also established. The Emeritus category allows deserving members, who are unable to actively participate but who deserve to be recognized, to be included. Emeritus status is defined as: non-active and non- voting, but deserving of recognition. Members in this category are also not counted in the official total of Distinguished Fellows, which is now limited to 1.5% of AENJ total membership.

In 1998 two additional members were recognized as Distinguished Fellows. They were: Gayle Jones, and Harry Meinzer. Harry Meinzer was designated as the first Emeritus fellow; the members were seven - six voting and one Emeritus.

In 2002 the AENJ Executive Board felt they should increase the number of members and reviewed a list of eligible candidates. Three members were selected to receive recognition: Helene Boedart, Lynn Dodson and Paula Valenti, bringing the number to nine active and one Emeritus. The death of Elaine Raichle reduces the active number to eight active.

At this point the board established a nomination criteria and procedures to encourage the Fellows membership to nominate candidates and to have criteria for judging all candidates equally. One candidate was nominated. The Board reviewed her nomination and Ruth Kaplan was selected for initiation at the 2003 conference Award Ceremony. The following other Distinguished Fellows have been inducted into membership. They include Phyllis Annett, Diane Franken (Emeritus), Carl Hower, Linda Pugliese, Angel Sheckmen and Valerie Negra. The latest member, inducted into the Fellows in 2009, is Ross Beitzel.

Dr. Paula Valenti is the current chair.