

Jean Smaglik Wells

.....in her own words

We are proud
 to present
 profiles of
 individuals
 who have
 been
 influential in
 promoting
 WDCC, Fine
 Craft, and
 the artists
 who produce
 it.

Here is
 one....

When a visiting potter came to our class at Pius XI High School in Milwaukee in 1982, I told myself....That is what I want to do for a living! In 1985, I was the first student at Pius to receive a large scholarship for Art School. I headed off to Cleveland Institute of Art, majoring in ceramics and minoring in portrait painting. Drawing and painting continued to be strong passions for me, along with clay. I left art school early to pursue an apprenticeship in the pottery field and eventually found one at Geneva Art Pottery, back in Lake Geneva, WI. There, I learned more practical skills of running a



Stephanie Bartz Photography

pottery business and honed my “nanny-ing” skills as I cared for the potter’s two young children. The potters, John Bailey and Claire Berger, both lived and worked in La Borne, France, a historic pottery village known for it’s wood-fired pottery. Their influence left a lasting impression on me.

Venturing off on my own as a potter, I eventually moved back to Milwaukee to pursue a career. With many hours dedicated to waiting tables and working for different catering companies, plus helping to manage a pottery shop in town, owned by John Bailey. I eventually developed a body of work that relied heavily on drawing, carving and painting with clay slip onto my functional pottery. My first art fair was the Wauwatosa Historical Society’s Fire Fly Art Fair, and it was a grand success for me. My uncle, Jerry Smaglik, a photographer in his spare time and supporter of the arts, bought me a year-long membership to WDCC, suggesting that it would be a good organization to get involved with! Over 20 years later, I am still a member,

Wisconsin Designer Crafts Council

1916 - 2016

working as a full-time potter, married, rearing my own two children, and heavily involved in the community.



Stephanie Bartz Photography

Currently, I sell most of my pottery directly at art and craft shows in the Milwaukee/Madison area and various locations in the Midwest. Three years ago, in order to keep pace with a changing marketplace, I also opened an online store via Etsy. The marketplace has definitely changed over the past 20 years; I believe artists need to find more creative ways to keep income streams coming into their businesses. Having an online store has not only helped my business grow nationally but has helped my local business as well. I am also a member of Local First Milwaukee, of which WDCC is also a member. This has helped me promote my business locally and develop relationships with other businesses. Over the past three years, I have created

limited edition coffee mugs for Colectivo Coffee Shops in the area.

Living as an artist has its financial challenges and has created a strong awareness in me of the needs of low-income workers and families. 17 years ago, a catering colleague of mine, Amy Dodge (Shully's Catering) and I started a local Empty Bowls event, Milwaukee Empty Bowls: www.milwaukeeemptybowls.org. This event uses ceramic arts and culinary arts to help create awareness of hunger in our local community and raise funds for local food banks and meal programs. Over the past 17 years, Milwaukee Empty Bowls has raised \$637,000 for these organizations.



Photos by: Stephanie Bartz Photography

Find Jean's ceramics on her website: www.jeansclaystudio.com and on her Etsy site: www.etsy.com/shop/jeansclaystudio