



## NEWS RELEASE

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## The Annual League of NH Craftsmen's Fair– the Oldest Crafts Fair in the US!

August 6-14, 2011

Mount Sunapee Resort, Newbury, NH

Concord, NH – In 1933, the fledgling League of NH Craftsmen, just a year old, embarked timidly on its first Craftsmen's Fair held at Crawford House in Crawford Notch – in a large barn that usually held ancient stage coaches. The barn was transformed into a demonstration space for pottery, weaving, vegetable dyeing, basket making, woodcarving, and other handcrafted items. The Crawford House blacksmith shop was used for ironmaking demonstrations, and the stalls were for the craft exhibition and sales. Afternoon entertainment consisted of chorus singing of old songs and country dancing on the lawn. The Fair was successful beyond any expectations with sales of \$2,698, and thus the Craftsmen's Fair became an annual event – and continues today to be one of the League's most important events.



Barns, vestries and town halls in communities such as Hancock, Rye, Laconia, Whitefield, Durham, and Plymouth hosted the Annual Craftsmen's Fair until 1948, when the event settled in the Belknap Recreation Area in Gilford for many years.

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David Campbell, executive director of the League from 1938 to 1962, promoted the League and the Annual Craftsmen's Fair to a broader audience. He sought out craftspeople from throughout the US and encouraged them to move to New Hampshire, educate others, and participate in the Fair and other activities. Under his direction, the Annual Craftsmen's Fair sales broke \$10,000 for the first time. An architect by profession, Campbell created beautiful, functional displays for the Fair that added to the fairgoers' experience.

When enamellist and metal smith Joseph Trippetti, one of New Hampshire's leading craftsmen, was appointed executive director of the League in June 1962, his focus was on the craftspeople. This was reflected in the 1965 Fair where, for the first time, the emphasis was almost entirely on individual booths for craftspeople. Recognizing that exposure to painting was a must for any serious craftsperson, Trippetti encouraged the New Hampshire Art Association, which had always had a spot at the Fair, to expand its own area and to offer a demonstration program.

### **Growth and Change in the Seventies**

In the late 60s and early 70s, many talented men and women moved to New Hampshire in unprecedented numbers to take advantage of the support for making fine craft. The League had grown and changed so rapidly there was much to be done to bring it up to the professionalism demanded of an organization of its scope and size. After 30 years of being housed in barns, vestries and town halls, in 1964 the Fair put down roots at Mount Sunapee State Park, which was then owned and managed by the state. In 1998, the state leased the management of the ski area to Tim and Diane Mueller. The League continues to enjoy a warm and cooperative association with Mount Sunapee Resort.

In the 1970s, Merle Walker became executive director and brought to the task much needed experience in business as well as in crafts. She upgraded Fair displays – engaging craftspeople and designers to help – and offered craftspeople training in business management, craft displays, how to take good slides (this fast becoming a necessity to submit to exhibit and wholesale market juries), and awareness of and control of health hazards. She raised funding for an award-based juried exhibition at the 1970 Fair.

These juried exhibitions became an ongoing feature of the Fair. By 1980, there were major awards in six media and two best-of-show awards, one jurors' choice and one popular choice. Fair sales in the 70s rose from \$59,000 to \$241,000.

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### **New Educational Programs in the 1980s**

In the 1980s, the Annual Craftsmen's Fair initiated new exhibitions and educational programs. Working studios, demonstrations, and workshops for adults and children encouraged fairgoers to try their hand at a variety of craft techniques. Juried exhibitions like *Living With Craft*, *Sculpture Garden*, and *CraftWear* educated the public in the use of quality furnishings and sculpture in the home and garden, and showcased beautiful wearables. These exhibitions have become very popular attractions for the Fair.

A large tent housing *The Shop at the Fair* provided exposure for juried craftspeople just starting their career or those who do not have enough inventory for a booth. This has become a very successful area for many emerging craftspeople. *The Next Generation* was initiated to showcase a small but growing number of offspring of juried craftspeople who have nurtured and encouraged their children to try craft as a way of life. Several of these promising young people have gone on to become juried themselves and have taken their place in the League community.

Beginning in 2005, educational tours of the Fair were given by juried members of the League. Focusing on a particular craft, the master takes fairgoers on a 45-minute tour of booths and exhibitions, providing commentary on the techniques and artistry that go into making fine craft. Tours highlight craft media such as glass, clay, wood, prints, metal and fiber. These tours offer fairgoers a greater appreciation of the quality and uniqueness of fine handcraft as well the standards to which craftspeople must adhere.

### **A Showcase for Dedicated Craftspeople**

The Fair is a fun, but a serious business event for approximately 350 of the League's juried members who typically participate each year. Exhibitors qualify for space on a combination of criteria including on-site jury score of their booth, seniority, and order of application. The stakes are high for exhibitors, and competition is keen. For many, nine days revenue from the Fair can account for over a third of a craftsperson's annual income. No commission from the craftspeople is required; however, proceeds from booth fees, sponsors and from the gate are used to defray Fair expenses and to underwrite the general operation of the League's education program.

The Fair takes a full year to prepare, three weeks to set up, runs for nine days, then takes three days to tear down. It attracts about 30,000 people including families, shoppers, collectors and tourists who come from all over the country to enjoy this unique event. For the past 78 years, the Annual Craftsmen's Fair has

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fulfilled the League's mission: *To encourage, nurture and promote the creation, use and preservation of fine contemporary and traditional craft through the inspiration and education of artists and the broader community.* The League represents the *signature of excellence* in fine craft, through the work of its juried members, and its rigorous standards for self expression, vision, and quality craftsmanship.



The League of NH Craftsmen is supported in part by grants from the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation.



For more information about the Fair, or the League of NH Craftsmen, call 603-224-3375, email [nhleague@nhcrafts.org](mailto:nhleague@nhcrafts.org), or visit the League's website at [www.nhcrafts.org](http://www.nhcrafts.org). You can also find the League of NH Craftsmen, the Annual Craftsmen's Fair, and each of the League's eight retail galleries on Facebook.

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