

# FOUNDATION

## EVENING ON THE PLAZA

### Three Artists Will Receive Ozarks Ambassador Award

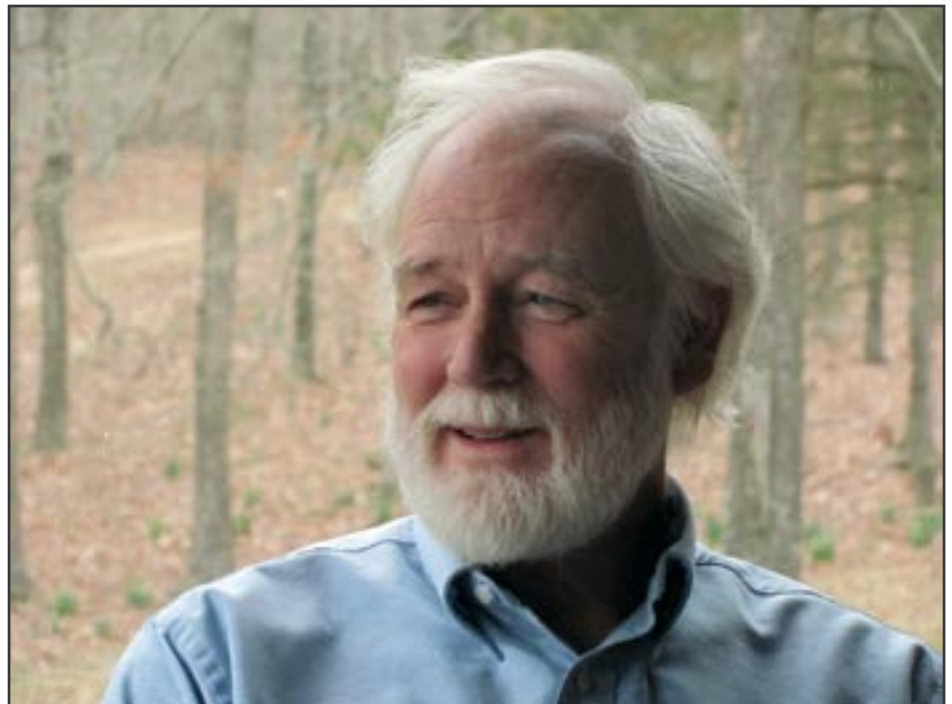
**P**ainters William McNamara and Kate Nessler, and photographer Tim Ernst, three area artists whose work shares the beauty of the Ozarks with people around the world, will receive the 2010 Ozarks Ambassador Award from the North Arkansas College Foundation.

“The selection committee honors Bill, Kate and Tim for their achievements, and for portraying the Ozarks so well through their art,” said Dr. Jeff Olson, president of North Arkansas College. “Each of the three brings honor to our area.”

The presentations will be Friday, May 7, in the L.E. “Gene” Durand Center during the Foundation’s annual Evening on the Plaza Dinner. The dinner follows a reception at 6 pm in the FedEx Freight Atrium at North Arkansas College’s Center Campus.

#### William McNamara

His style is traditional, but Bill McNamara’s visions “are somehow contemporary,” according to his website. “Close inspection of



*William McNamara*

his work reveals the abstract qualities of layers of color, the play of light and shadow, and the subtle and intricate patterns of nature, which combine in paintings often described as ‘magical realism.’”

Born Sept. 3, 1946, in Shreveport, La., McNamara grew up on the banks of Caddo Lake near the Texas border. His mother was

an “amateur artist,” Bill says, “and I started drawing before I can remember. I could draw realistically by the time I was 12.”

McNamara graduated from North Caddo Parrish High School in nearby Vivien, and completed a bachelor’s degree at Centenary College. “I started as a math major, switched to literature, and

ended up in art," he recalls, "but I was drawing and painting all along."

After completing graduate school at New Mexico Highlands University in Las Vegas, New Mexico, Bill lived for a time in Spain, then returned to Centenary and taught for a few years under his mentor, Willard Cooper.

His time in Europe "made me want to come back to America and

find a place to be," McNamara told writer Don Harington in an interview years later. Bill and his now ex-wife, Milancy, who remains his friend and business manager, visited Newton County over Easter in 1974 and "fell in love" with the area. After moving to the Ozarks, they had three sons: Patrick (35), John Michael (30), and Christopher (25). The only drawback to living where they settled, Bill reflects,

was the 28-mile round trip bus ride for the boys to the Jasper school.

McNamara still paints and lives on Cave Mountain bordering the Upper Buffalo Wilderness Area. "His affinity for the wild places surrounding his home," according to [mcnamarawatercolors.com](http://mcnamarawatercolors.com), "is reflected in his 'intimate' landscapes of small pools or studies of lichen and rock, and in his watercolors of the Buffalo River Country, which the National Park Service reproduced as murals for the Buffalo National River Visitor Center at Tyler Bend."

In his struggling artist days, Bill's first local exhibit was at what was then known as North Arkansas Community College. He credits Katherine and Joe Nance for hosting a dinner for him at their Newton County home that resulted in important early sales of his work.

The rest, as the saying goes, is history.

McNamara's art has been featured in major exhibitions such as those held by the Butler Institute of American Art and the National Watercolor Society. He's had solo exhibits at the Arkansas Arts Center and the Springfield Art Museum, both of which include McNamara paintings in their permanent collections, the Walton Arts Center, and many other regional museums.

He's currently working on the fifth painting in a series of 16 large works, which he has titled, "Rocks and Water: Abstract Realism," in preparation for a major new exhibit. The series should be complete, Bill estimates, in two or three years.

But he's in no particular hurry. McNamara says he paints nearly every day, without putting in long hours. "My eyes and arms give out after a time," he explains, "but

## OZARKS AMBASSADOR AWARD

The Ozarks Ambassador Award will be presented to William McNamara, Kate Nessler and Tim Ernst during the Foundation's annual Evening on the Plaza Dinner at the L.E. "Gene" Durand Center on Friday, May 7, at 6:30 p.m.

Original McNamara and Nessler paintings and Ernst photographs on canvas will be on display during a pre-dinner reception in the FedEx Freight Atrium on Northark's Center Campus at 6 p.m. Tickets for the event are \$30 each. For more information, contact Jacquie Markle (391-3159).

The special menu for the evening will include a catered dinner featuring summer salad, bacon-wrapped smoked pork loin with apple glaze, Mediterranean chicken breast on couscous, roasted red bliss potatoes, vegetable medley, dinner rolls, and cheese cake.

Established in 1990, the Ozarks Ambassador Award is presented to someone from northern Arkansas who has represented the area with distinction nationwide in one or more of the following fields: agriculture, finance, medicine, education, politics, law, business, social services, the arts, the ministry, or industry.

Robert M. Eagle of Dallas, TX, was the 1990 recipient. Others include James H. Jones of San Francisco, CA, (1991); David R. Banks of Fort Smith (1992); William P. Stiritz of St. Louis, MO, (1993); James F. Keenan of Palm Beach, FL, (1994); Dr. Ronald C. Jones of Dallas, TX, (1995); Tom and Don Salmon of Little Rock (1996); John Paul Hammerschmidt of Harrison (1997); C.D. Wright of Barrington, RI, (1998); Sheridan Garrison of Harrison (1999); David Perry of Mountain View, Calif., (2000); University of Arkansas Chancellor Dr. John A. White (2002); former Arkansas Supreme Court Chief Justice Jack Holt, Jr., of Little Rock (2003); Northark graduate and former Tyson Foods General Counsel Les Baledge of Fayetteville (2004); John Arthur Hammerschmidt of Washington, D.C., (2006); Ranger Boats founder Forrest Wood of Flippin (2007); Arkansas Supreme Court Chief Justice Jim Hannah of Little Rock (2008); and State Rep. Uvalde Lindsey of Fayetteville (2009).

The award was not presented in 2001 or 2005. Instead, the Foundation recognized retiring North Arkansas College President Dr. Bill Baker at the BBB Bar-B-Que and Blow-Out in 2001 and honored former Twin Lakes Vocational Technical School Director Weldon Stevenson in 2005.

I've painted so long, it's like an addiction: I don't feel good unless I do it."

Bill paints "whatever grabs my eye," he says, "but I don't know quite how things percolate to the top. For every one thing I paint, a dozen things grab my eye."

In "Songs of Sunlight and Water," his 1989 feature story about McNamara in the *Arkansas Times*, Harington, who passed away last summer, wrote: "William McNamara hears the voice of the Ozarks, and his paintings have a language all their own...Arkansas [in McNamara] has one of the most original, the most dazzling, and the most satisfying of contemporary American artists."

Bill's paintings are masterpieces "by anyone's standards," wrote Harington. "The water talks to him, and so do the rocks. The trees sing to him, and so does the sky. He listens while he watches, but it's the watching that matters most: the eye that takes it all in and puts it all down, in watercolor on rough paper, for all of us to know."

McNamara originals have become treasures over the years. People often ask Bill if he hates to give his paintings up when they are sold.

"It's never bothered me a bit to let them go," he answers. "They are all still mine; people are just hanging them for me."

### Kate Nessler

Although Chicago was "pretty much home base" for her family, Kate Nessler was born April 21, 1950, in St. Louis. Her father's job with General Motors kept the family on the move until they settled in Michigan when she was in the fifth grade.



*Kate Nessler*

: "I always drew, even when I was  
: a kid, and my parents always sup-  
: ported my goals," Kate remembers.  
: "They never said, 'Art is fine, but  
: you need to do something else to  
: make money.' Basically, the only  
: thing they said was, 'Whatever  
: you decide to do, do it well.'"

: Nessler, who had the same,  
: "great" art instructor in grades  
: seven through 12, sold her first  
: painting—"a huge oil painting of  
: a washer woman"—while she was  
: still in high school. It was pur-  
: chased by a woman who was well-  
: known as a weaver. Kate remem-  
: bers a visit to the woman's home,  
: which was located close enough  
: to Detroit that they could see the  
: fires burning in the riots of 1967.

: With her parents' encourage-  
: ment, Kate attended what is now  
: Kendall College of Art and Design  
: in Grand Rapids, Michigan. She  
: majored in fine arts illustration  
: and graduated in 1972. Thirty-sev-  
: en years later, in May of 2009, she  
: was honored by her alma mater  
: with the Kendall Distinguished  
: Alumni Award.

: According to her website,  
: [katenessler.com](http://katenessler.com), "Kate Nessler lives  
: and works in Kingston, Arkansas.  
: In this rural environment she con-  
: tinues to find the subjects for her  
: work, whether from the vegetable  
: garden, the woods, roadside, or  
: pastures."

: Nessler and her husband, Bill  
: Horrell, moved to the Natural State

three decades ago. The couple wrote for information about Eureka Springs and Fayetteville, but decided to look around in Madison County after receiving a flyer from a Huntsville realtor.

“Not having children, we were pretty free to go where we wanted,” Kate says. They had visited Bill’s family a few times in southern Missouri, but the move from the big city to the rural Ozarks was still quite an adjustment.

“Although we looked at some others, the house we bought was the first house we saw,” Nessler recalls. “We had been living in an apartment in Chicago, and suddenly we had 40 acres and a spring. Fortunately, we had really good neighbors.”

Bill and Kate did various jobs, including construction work remodeling homes. “You learn to do what it takes to make a living,” says Kate, who stayed focused on her art.

At her first art fair in Prairie Grove, Nessler sold one painting—to Bill’s dad, for \$30. “Family is everything, sometimes,” she admits. “I was new and it was hard in the beginning. I had to get my feet wet. But I was really focused and determined. I just worked and worked to get somewhere.”

Over time, Kate started doing more and more paintings of flowers and plants. But she says she didn’t think of herself as a botanical artist until a sculptor, who was a juror at a Florida art fair, told her she should contact Jim White, then-curator of the Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation in Pittsburgh.

With White’s encouragement, Nessler began exhibiting her work in the United Kingdom.

“Botanical art in England has always been in style. I went to

workshops and exhibited over there, and it gave me so much,” she explains. “There just wasn’t a community of artists in our country at that time like there was in the UK.”

Eventually, Kate helped change the state of botanical art in America. She was the first chair of the American Society of Botanical Artists ([www.asba.org](http://www.asba.org)), which now has over 1,000 members and is, in her words, “an amazing organization.”

Nessler’s career path has been as impressive as the growth of ASBA. Her work is in various permanent collections around the world, including the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C., The Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation in Pittsburgh, The Shirley Sherwood Collection in the UK, and The RHS Lindley Library in the UK. She is a contributing member of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden Florilegium Society in New York and The Highgrove Florilegium in the UK. She has been awarded three Gold medals from the Royal Horticultural Society.

For inspiration, “all I need to do is look out the window,” Kate says. “Everything’s been just outside the door. Probably 90 percent of everything I’ve done has been from my own surroundings.”

“Every time something dies and something else comes out of the ground, it’s something new and beautiful,” she continues. “I can express what I need to in the forms I find outside. It’s beautiful out there. That’s why I paint.”

Some day Nessler, who teaches master’s workshops all over the country, will leave behind the knowledge she has shared and her impressive body of work.

“I guess we all want to leave a

legacy. If this is mine, I think it’s a good one,” she admits. “But I want it to stay because it’s still good in 100 years, not because of who did it. It’s about the work. It’s not really about me. It’s about the work.”

## Tim Ernst

Aptly described in his [timernst.com](http://timernst.com) bio as “Arkansas’ nature photographer,” Tim Ernst’s credits include photographs in hundreds of national, regional and local publications, ranging from *National Geographic* and the *New York Times* to National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service maps and brochures. Ten collections of Tim’s wilderness photographs are coffee table picture books, and his newest effort, *Arkansas Fall*, will be published this summer.

The author of numerous backpacking articles, Ernst has written more than a dozen hiking trail guidebooks. He founded and served 28 years as president of the Ozark Highlands Trail Association, an organization with members in 25 states and five foreign countries, and has been writing his popular online *Cloudland Journal* since 1998. Tim also has taught digital photography workshops now for 20 years.

Born May 11, 1955, in Fayetteville, Ernst stayed home after graduating from high school to attend the University of Arkansas. As a college sophomore, he answered a newspaper ad that promised he could make money taking pictures.

“It was a business taking candid photos of fraternity and sorority parties,” he says, “and selling small prints.”

Tim added sports team photography to the mix, eventually



*Tim Ernst*

employed as many as 30 part-time photographers, won contracts to photograph high school graduations as far away as California, and his student job eventually “bloomed into a pretty major business.”

By 1980, he reports with his typical, self-deprecating humor, “my antisocial, hermit personality came to the front, so I sold that business, moved into the woods, and became a nature photographer.”

Selling the business was critical to a successful transition. The way the sale was structured, “I got paid for five years not to work,” he explains. “That gave me the luxury

of going out and developing my nature photography business. My working capital was the business I sold. If I hadn’t had the business to sell and had tried to make it from scratch, I probably couldn’t have.”

Ernst also credits his wife, Pam, whom he met 10 years ago, with his financial success. “She became my full-time partner,” he says. “Getting married helped me more than anything.”

Tim, Pam and their daughter, Amber, who is a junior at Jasper High School, live in one of the most idyllic settings in the Ozarks. Their home, reached after a drive

of nine miles on rough gravel roads, sits high on the edge of the upper Buffalo wilderness, overlooking the headwaters of the Buffalo National River.

If you lean out from Tim’s lower deck, you can see the Ozarks’ most famous landmark, Hawksbill Crag, about three-fourths of a mile away as the eagle flies. But visitors to the Crag can’t see his multi-story log home.

“It took me 15 years to find a piece of property that fit right. I bought it over the phone, sight-unseen, after looking it up on a map. It turned out to be every bit of everything I was looking for,” Tim says. “Buying this property was like my career: it took lots of work, but in the end it came down to just dumb luck.”

Ernst may be fortunate, but he’s also the kind of person who has a passion for his work, works hard, and admits “everything I’ve done has sprung out of a love for doing it.” And there is tremendous synergy among his varied interests.

“The trail guide business started because I loved to hike and we didn’t have any trails to hike on. So I saw an opportunity to start a trails club. Through that I had to draw maps. All of a sudden, a bell went off and I thought, ‘People will buy this stuff,’” he says. “I started selling one map at one outdoor store, built up a base, and grew all the guide books. The next natural progression was to publish picture books of my work. It was all sort of bundled together, but happened by accident.”

The *Cloudland Journal* (online at [timernst.com](http://timernst.com)) began as him “writing down my thoughts about the day and adding pictures,” Tim says, “and has taken on a life of its own. It has absolutely exploded since

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the day I started writing it 12 years ago. We get 2,000 to 3,000 internet hits a day from people all over the world. Many live vicariously through the journal.”

Like his neighbor, Bill McNamara, Ernst loves to write, and the *Journal* gives him an opportunity to “sit down and write a story.”

There’s not enough space to properly describe the time and effort required for Tim to produce the photographs so many people covet and admire. However, changes in technology have opened up all sorts of possibilities for him.

“With the advances in digital photography,” he says, “I’m able to make photographs that I could never have done before. The state of the art continues to be way out there, and I continue to try and catch it.”

If something sparks his interest, Tim says, he photographs it.

“I try to capture what moves me,” he explains. “People say

the camera doesn’t lie, but lots of times the camera isn’t able to capture the emotion of the moment. Sometimes that’s really difficult to do.”

In his February 10, 2010, posting in the *Journal*, Tim writes:

*It is a clear, starkly beautiful night in the wilderness tonight! The moon has not appeared yet but will soon top the eastern horizon and send its moonbeams throughout the land. Right now the black sky looks down on a landscape that remains blanketed with white. During the daytime we can see so much farther into the woods, and so much more detail is visible with the snow background. Giant chunks of sandstone that have separated from the big bluff line are well defined—and I want to go visit each and every one of them!*

And he undoubtedly will. As Tim Ernst likes to say, he will “see ya in the woods.”

## Here to Stay

Various works by Ernst, Nessler and McNamara are on display year-round at Northark. Limited edition McNamara prints grace the Durand Center, prints from Nessler’s Baker Prairie Natural Area Series may be found near the entrance of the South Campus, and some of Ernst’s Buffalo River area photographs on canvas hang in the Allied Health Addition.

Although they aren’t natives of the college’s service area like previous Ozarks Ambassadors, all three artists chose to live in this beautiful part of the world. And they seem unlikely to leave anytime soon. Perhaps a comment by McNamara sums up how all three feel.

“I didn’t come here because I wanted to paint here,” Bill says. “I came here to live here. I’ve never left—and don’t intend to.”