

Behind the Prize

By Jim McCloskey

My father was a teacher by trade.

When I was a kid, there were bookcases on the landing between the two floors of our home filled with the volumes he had used in teaching the history of science and technology in the 1940s and '50s. There was one book on those many shelves that always fascinated me.

He'd brought it back from France just after World War II ended, and it had never been bound or trimmed, meaning the pages didn't open unless you cut the edges with a knife. The book was entitled *L'Architecture: Le Passé, Le Présent*, and it gradually revealed its treasures to me as I grew bold enough to wield an X-Acto blade in its presence.

Alongside it were dozens of other books on art history, language, mathematics, engineering, religion, politics, urban history and myriad other subjects that had caught his professorial eye and had been important enough to him that he was delighted if any of his six children showed interest. As he once said to me, "To know any particular subject very well, you need to know a little bit about all the subjects that surround it" – a boundlessly curious outlook I've found myself pursuing in everything I've done throughout my own lengthening life.

Joseph McCloskey knew little of watershaping (although I

always suspected he knew more about their aqueducts than the Romans did). He had, however, worked his way through college as a lifeguard at Kennywood Park in Pittsburgh, Pa. – and, in those post-Great Depression years, kept body and soul together as a tutor, railway router and auto mechanic as well. His mix of intellect, experience and ambition made him hunger for knowledge of how things worked, why they worked and what to do with them when they broke down.

As a longtime homeowner, he sometimes replaced or repaired faucets, but not often enough that he ever felt the need to buy a basin wrench. Instead, he would send me (his frequent assistant) to the garage to dig up a couple long screwdrivers, a few heavy rubber bands, some small C-clamps and a tennis ball. With a bit of cursing and the occasional barked knuckle, he always managed to get the job done – and my lifelong admiration for the human capacity to make things work under challenging circumstances was born.

My thought in naming The Joseph McCloskey Prize for Outstanding Achievement in the Art and Craft of Watershaping after my father is that the people who are to receive this award – now and in the future – exemplify to me something grand and wonderful about the pursuit of knowledge, the spirit of resourcefulness and creative adaptation, the quest for innovation and quality and, perhaps most important of all, the raw desire to transfer information to others that my father embodied on the grandest possible scale for thousands of students through a career that stretched from the late 1930s until he finally retired as a professor of management theory and business administration in the 1990s.

This prize, in other words, is something I take very personally. I am pleased to invite these three watershapers – professionals who in my eye have risen to a level of distinction matched only by a precious few – to help me honor my father's memory by accepting this award in the passionate spirit he embodied and with which it is offered. Further, I challenge them (until they, too, retire) to keep doing all they can to share what they know, selflessly and ceaselessly: No mission in life has greater significance.

Sculptures by Jonathan Newell, JN Designs, Arroyo Grande, Calif.
Photo by Allan D. Walker, ADW Photography, Santa Monica, Calif.



Founding Sponsors

Crystal Fountains (Toronto, Ontario, Canada)
Aquamatic Cover Systems (Gilroy, Calif.)
Genesis 3 Design Group (Murfreesboro, Tenn.)
Haddonstone (Bellmawr, N.J.)
Cover-Pools (Salt Lake City, Utah)
Roman Fountains (Albuquerque, N.M.)
Jandy (Petaluma, Calif.)
National Plasterers Council (Port Charlotte, Fla.)



About the Sculptor...

Jonathan Newell is a sculptor (and occasional watershaper) based in Arroyo Grande, Calif. Working in metal, stone, wood and glass, he has more than two decades' experience on every scale from fine jewelry to civic monuments, drawing inspiration from years of scuba diving and the study of marine environments to express organic forms found in coastal waters. He also works with architects, designers and private clients on custom projects in many styles. For more information, visit his Web site: www.jndesign.net.

Anthony Archer Wills

By Eric Herman

Even as one who makes a living writing and editing, it's difficult for me to find words sufficient to describe the experience of meeting and getting to know Anthony Archer Wills.

The best I can do is to describe encountering him as being something akin to opening a fine bottle of champagne: All at once, he is sophisticated, effervescent, joyous, refined, substantial, complex and always ready to treat each moment as a celebration. To linger for any length of time in Anthony's presence is distinctly exhilarating.

I could easily run through a similar set of superlatives about the man's masterful performance as a watergardener and pond/stream builder. It's no exaggeration to call Anthony an artist, not even if you further classify him as one of the greatest practitioners ever to work in this field. He is without doubt the poet laureate of naturalistic watergardens, a trailblazer and pioneer, an inspiration to countless others who do all they can to follow in his footsteps and the driving force behind some of the most stunning compositions in rocks, plants, earth and water ever created by anyone, anywhere.

Since the mid-1960s, when he began operating a small nursery in his native England, Anthony has worked steadily at perfecting his craft and fine-tuning the smallest details of design and construction even when working on the grandest scales. Wherever he applies his skills, stunning realism and breathtaking beauty are the seemingly inevitable results.

Anthony has also done more than his share of relaying what he knows to anyone willing to listen and observe and has made presentations in academic and trade venues too numerous to list. In lectures that sometimes expand to epic length, he generously explains the most nuanced aspects of his art, listens to and answers questions with careful, thorough attention and greets just about everyone he meets as though he or she were *exactly* the person he wanted to see at that very moment. He has also written three definitive books that have been printed in a half-dozen languages and in the process has become a figure of international renown.

For all the accolades one might lay at his feet, however, Anthony himself is much more than the sum of these parts. Quite simply, he is one of the kindest, most courteous and charmingly curious souls I've ever known. In my own association with him in working on his numerous contributions to *WaterShapes*, he has regaled me with hour upon hour of stories, anecdotes, observations and insights, all with an openness and gentility of spirit that is extraordinarily uncommon in today's world.

Tremendously good humored, Anthony is at the same time far from frivolous. Indeed, his work is an almost perfect reflection of the fullness of his personality: grand and sophisticated, yet welcoming and comforting. And where most people who've achieved as much as he has tend to be vested with egos to match, in Anthony's case genius manifests itself through a soft-spoken, understated commitment to artistic excellence that speaks more loudly than any words I've ever heard from him.

If watergardening has become a modern art form, the seeds were planted by Anthony Archer Wills. For four decades, he has shown the world how beautiful, sublime and exquisite works of aquatic art can become when masterfully conceived and executed. As important, he has also demonstrated that such greatness can thrive in the body of a true gentleman.

I can think of no one more worthy of The McCloskey Prize. Congratulations and cheers to Anthony – and his beloved Pauline!



