



# Community Development Division

Lilly Endowment's renewal programs also reach out to artists and arts administrators and human service professionals, many of whom operate unnoticed in the public arena. To honor their outstanding work and valuable contributions to the vitality and welfare of the community, the Endowment supports the Creative Renewal Fellowship Program and the Human Service Professional Renewal Program. The first is administered by the Arts Council of Indianapolis, the second by the United Way of Central Indiana.

# Time out

In June 1966 John Sherman, a 2005-2006 Creative Renewal fellowship winner, left his cap and gown from Indiana University on a table after the graduation ceremony in Bloomington. That was on a Monday. By Saturday he was in Atlanta, Ga., undergoing Peace Corps training. A farm boy from rural Marshall County, Ind., Sherman recalls, "My parents always encouraged me to go out and see the world." Good advice.

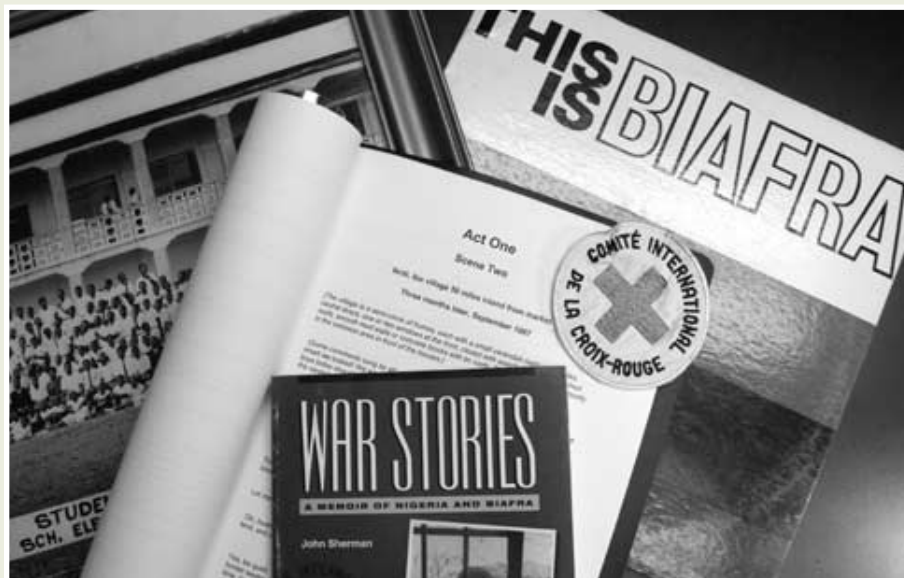
But they probably didn't envision their son ending up in the middle of the Biafran uprising of 1967-1970. He arrived in Africa in May 1967. By the next March, civil tensions were rising, order was breaking down, and the Peace Corps pulled Sherman out in early July. Meanwhile, the world was seeing endless film footage of starving children, murderous rampages, and the gradual disintegration of the uprising. For a while, Sherman was incommunicado. His hometown paper ran a headline: Where in the world is John Sherman?

He was reassigned to Malawi and later returned to Nigeria as part of the International Red Cross relief efforts. Over the next several years he coped with a measles epidemic, ran road blocks, contracted malaria and force-fed medicine to gravely ill children. He served in various capacities in Ghana for the American Field Service in 1971 and the Peace Corps until 1973. After an administrative stint in Washington, D.C., he and his wife, Lois (they met during Peace Corps training), headed first to Santa Fe, N.M., and eventually back to Indiana to launch a public relations business in Indianapolis. Through it all, he was writing — nine books of fiction, personal experiences, history and poetry.

But Biafra was never far from his mind, and in 2002 he finished a book called *War Stories: A Memoir of Nigeria and Biafra*. With the help of a Creative Renewal fellowship in 2005

he planned to promote the book as a college text and return to Nigeria to revisit the sites he had known nearly 40 years earlier. When he

(OPPOSITE) Creative Renewal fellowship recipient John Sherman wraps himself in an Akwete cloth he bought in a village in Biafra, now a state in Nigeria. Sherman wrote a book, *War Stories* (below) and an opera based on his experiences as a Peace Corps and International Red Cross volunteer during the Biafran uprising in the 1960s.





the entire opera continues.  
**Building community**

The Creative Renewal Fellowship Program that helped Sherman transform his Biafran experiences into words and music began in 1998 with a Lilly Endowment grant to the Indianapolis Arts Council. The council continues to administer the program that every other year awards grants to 50 artists and arts administrators from the Indianapolis area. To date, the Endowment has allocated \$2 million to support the program through which 200 artists and arts administrators have received fellowships. In 2006 the Endowment awarded another \$530,000 to continue the initiative.

"These fellowships are an investment in individual artists – writers, painters, dancers, musicians, arts administrators, actors, composers, printmakers, sculptors, photographers, costume designers – that help them rediscover their passion, imagination and creativity," says Greg Charleston, president of the council. "We make a big deal about announcing the recipients at a major event, and this program has contributed to the development of a real artist community here. It has created new synergies and collaborations.

*With her fellowship, lacquer painter Nhat Tran returned to her native Vietnam and then to Japan to refine her techniques. The lacquer comes from Japan and the tedious process involves hours of priming, painting and sanding to produce hundreds of layers for a finished piece of art.*

learned that Nigeria was too dangerous for tourists, he scrambled to come up with a Plan B for his creative renewal project. Time was running out, and it wasn't until he and Lois attended an Indianapolis Opera performance of *Turandot* last May that an idea occurred to him. He suddenly turned to Lois: "I can write an opera!"

Undaunted by the fact he had never even written a play, he packed an anthology of opera libretti, scooped up a handful of classical CDs, and headed for the Mary Anderson Center for the Arts, a friary deep in the southern Indiana woods. Three days later he had produced a libretto of *Biafra*, then set about recruiting Nathaniel Blume at the Butler Chamber Orchestra to write the score. "None of this 'mod' stuff," cautioned Sherman. "I'm a Puccini-Verdi sort of guy." A group of 14 music students and some graduates from Butler lent him their talents, and the Indianapolis Opera added the sets.

They selected a part of the second act to be scored. The result was the presentation of that 20-minute excerpt of *Biafra* at the Artsgarden in downtown Indianapolis. The lead singer wore Sherman's Red Cross patch for old time's sake. The work on finishing



"After their renewal experiences, their 'classes' deepen their experiences by getting together as often as they can. Many feel a sense of identity with their fellow class members. We've even noticed members of different renewal classes getting together.

"By bolstering artists in this way, the council hopes to provide new energy to keep artists living and working here and ultimately enhance the quality of life in central Indiana. We all benefit from that investment," Charleston adds.

### **Following a dream**

Lacquer painter Nhat Tran, among the first class of grant recipients, points to her post-fellowship success as proof that the grants have long-term benefits. "Look at my resume," she exclaims. "Before the grant, nothing. After the grant, bling, bling, bling."

Among the "blings": the Smithsonian American Art Museum noticed her work, and her *Bouquet for You* is now at home there. *Points of Light, Points of Might* – her reaction to the 9-11 tragedy – was selected for an international tour, acquired by the Corcoran Gallery and is now part of the gallery's permanent collection. Her current project is a 29-piece sculpture commissioned for the new Indianapolis International Airport. She anticipates that the work will require 580 layers of lacquer for priming, plus 500 layers more for painting. Then the mural will be cured in a specially constructed heat-and-humidity-controlled room until 2008 to acclimate the piece to the temperature of its final resting place.

Tran's \$7,500 renewal grant allowed her to return to her native Vietnam where she visited her father ("a doctor for the poor people") and traveled around the country. "I learned a good deal about lacquer technique by visiting the artists in Vietnam and especially by conducting my own experiments for three months," she says. The grant deepened her commitment to her art and to "pass it forward." She says that she has a dream "that when I get old, I can save some money, and I would like someday to give back to Vietnam artists."

### **Picture this....**

William A. Rasdell, also a member of the 1999-2000, started out as a photographer. "When I first began, I liked the way I looked with cameras around my neck," he admits. Now he's not sure he even owns a camera, but his photographs are at the core of the art he creates with the help of his computer. Utilizing the huge body of imagery that he has collected over the years, he scans his film, digitizes images, manipulates and Photoshops them to the max. He combines traditional and high-tech processes to produce pigment ink prints on a variety of materials such as aluminum, acrylic and wood veneers.

Rasdell says the creative renewal grant "really made all the difference in the world in my career as an artist. The technology had



*William Rasdell used his love for photographic and computer techniques to take trips to Cuba and the Caribbean to soak in the vibrant culture and bring it back to Indianapolis.*

finally caught up to the visions of things I'd wanted to do for years." His interest in Caribbean art and music came to the fore when the Pan American Games came to Indianapolis in 1987. In 1999-2000 he used fellowship funds to underwrite an eight-week trip to Cuba and Puerto Rico. In Havana he visited a small alley that was adorned with murals and sculptures by a Cuban artist. The alley also was the site of a weekly rumba, packed with musicians, dancers, locals and tourists. The lively mix of people and the arts prompted an idea. He currently is recreating the alley – Callejon de Hamel: African Roots in Cuban Soil – in the Star Studio of the Indianapolis Museum of Art for a February-July 2007 show as part of a larger exhibition celebrating Cuban art.

### **Time out for art**

Two arts administrators, Carol M. White and Stephanie Lewis Robertson, used their creative renewal fellowships to push away from their desks and indulge their passion to "just go and do art," as

Robertson says.

White, manager of studio and community art programs at the Indianapolis Museum of Art, received her fellowship in 2001 and proceeded to create 25 paintings interpreting the work of poet Dr. Henry Sawyerr, who grew up in Nigeria and studied in Poland. The result was an exhibition called "Beyond Borders and Across Oceans: Two Continents." White jokes that people consider her an "oddball" because art is her focus in and out of the office. "They want to know how you can be an artist and [work at the museum] at the same time," she says. Her answer is simple: "It's fun, and I love it."

Robertson, a fiber artist, had been on staff at the Indianapolis Art Center for six years when she received her renewal fellowship in 2001. She toured galleries in Chicago, visited studios in Cincinnati and Charleston and spent time teaching aspiring artists. It was this interaction with working professionals that nudged her toward a major decision. "The grant absolutely changed my life," she claims. "I realized I needed to make art, and I needed to make art for me. I decided to leave the Art Center and pursue art full time. The grant gave me permission to try."

Robertson now works in a large, airy studio in the Stutz building in Indianapolis and is president of the artists association there. Her space is filled with boxes of fabric swatches, four sewing machines and other tools of her craft. She has branched out into doing three-dimensional fabric and paper sculptures and credits much of her creative

zeal to the renewal fellowship. "It's affected how I teach and the kind of art I am producing," she says. "It has been a powerful experience because it just keeps on happening."

## Taking care of caretakers

**With mounting documentation** about how "time out" can refresh teachers, clergy, artists and arts administrators, the Endowment extended its renewal efforts in 2001 by creating similar opportunities for human service professionals. These are community caretakers and caregivers who work in the countless nonprofit organizations throughout Indianapolis and the surrounding counties. Through 2006 the Endowment has awarded nearly \$1.5 million to the United Way of Central Indiana (UWCI) to administer the renewal program. So far, 125 persons have received these grants, many of whom fit the description of "unsung heroes."

*Carol White, an administrator at the Indianapolis Museum of Art and a painter, collaborated with an African poet to produce a series of 25 paintings for her creative renewal project. She says she often uses universal symbols, such as a house, pyramid or boat, in her painting. No stranger to the benefits of renewal, White also received a Teacher Creativity fellowship in 1995 when she was an art teacher.*



"This is a program with a powerful payback to everyone in its wake," says Ellen K. Annala, UWCI president and CEO. "Right from the beginning, we try to recognize and honor their work by announcing the recipients at a big gathering. It's gratifying to observe many of them 'walking a little taller' after having their life's work acknowledged. Too often their efforts fly under the larger community's radar.

"Our human service professionals are very mission-driven people who live and breathe their work. This program has certainly delivered on its promise to recharge the participants, but in turn their renewal has frequently reenergized their own organizations," Annala adds.

Some recipients have gone on silent retreats, others – like Diane Arnold, executive director of the Hawthorne Community Center – have traveled far beyond their bases of operations to get new perspectives on their work back home.

Arnold has lived in her near westside neighborhood of Indianapolis all her life. Her parents and family still live there, too. Executive director of the Hawthorne Community Center, she has worked there for 38 years. In fact, she followed in the footsteps of her mother who worked there for 25 years, about nine as executive director.

Arnold admits that she was motivated to apply for a grant



*Fiber artist Stephanie Robertson works in a large studio in the 96-year-old Stutz building near downtown Indianapolis, home to more than 60 artists. Robertson, who says the creative renewal fellowship "changed her life," is president of the building association.*

because she needed a change so she could cope with the different circumstances surrounding her. "I went to school here; I went to col-





lege here; I married my high school sweetheart here, and I work here," says Arnold. "If you had told me 10 years ago that 80 percent of our preschool population and 35 percent of the people in my neighborhood would not speak English, I would have thought you were crazy."

To reach out to the Hispanic community that it serves, Hawthorne offers day-care programs, ESL classes, a food pantry, counseling, crisis intervention, holiday assistance, senior services — you name it. Plus, it may be the only com-

munity center in the city that brings in a veterinarian once a week to vaccinate dogs and cats. "I'm a big animal lover," says Arnold.

She passed up the first opportunity to apply for a grant because she was too busy raising funds and serving on neighborhood committees. But when she heard grant recipients talking about rejuvenation

*Diane Arnold, executive director of the Hawthorne Community Center, grew up in the neighborhood and lives only three doors away from the center. For her fellowship she got "pampered" in Cuernavaca, Mexico, and returned for a language immersion project so she could work more effectively with the Hispanic population in her area.*



effects of the fellowship program, she decided to give it a try.

"I wanted to be pampered, just for a week," she recalls. "And I wanted to improve my Spanish." Onto the Internet she went, and there she found a spa about 50 miles south of Mexico City. It sounded perfect, and it was. She came back and searched for an opportunity to help her master Spanish. She found one by joining a group of IUPUI nursing, education and social work students who were bound for a part of Mexico near the spa she had visited earlier. The experience was "phenomenal" and had long-term and unanticipated benefits. "The university wanted the students to continue their work in a community when they returned to Indianapolis," she says. "Ta-dah! — Hawthorne was just the place for them."





### Eyeing the big picture

As president of the Marion County Commission on Youth (McCoy), John Brandon worries about the big picture. McCoy is a youth services intermediary that provides training to youth workers throughout central Indiana and ensures that young people have the support and opportunities they need. A former youth worker with about 30 years in the field, Brandon realized that he needed a pause to refresh. "Many times we in the helping fields don't do a very good job of taking care of ourselves," he says. "One of the great things about the renewal program is figuring out what it is that would benefit you. My thing was to interact with others in a learning environment."

With this in mind, he traveled to Harvard for a week of leadership courses aimed at persons who direct nonprofit organizations. His classmates were from as far away as Kenya and as close as Cincinnati. The coursework was invigorating, as expected, but the perks were a total surprise. "We were treated like royalty," reports Brandon. "They rolled out the red carpet because they wanted us to know that our work is valued and appreciated. It was an intense week, but I had a wonderful time."

### Tending the garden

The grant opportunity earns similar rave reviews from Pamela Altmeyer who, like Brandon, works at an agency that provides support to a large network of social service agencies. Gleaners Food Bank of Indiana is an Indianapolis-based agency that serves more than 400 charities that feed the hungry each week throughout central Indiana. As CEO, Altmeyer describes herself as a "cheerleader" and has the energy to prove it.

But the time came when she knew she needed renewal. She married five years ago and was faced with combining two households,

*John Brandon went to Cambridge, Mass., and attended a Harvard leadership program for nonprofit leaders. He is president of a youth services intermediary organization. Edie Olson, president of the 171-year-old Family Service Association, discovered that she could feel renewed by staying home, working on house projects and spending more time with her children.*

plus a dog and two cats. "Combining their households" meant going through five Pods of "stuff."

Her renewal came in three parts: Getting rid of the stuff was No.1, first in her office. She danced on the desk when she cleared the top. Then it was time for No.2: Clean out the garage. "The analogy I made in the proposal was that I needed to 'weed the garden of my life.' I guess I didn't realize that by not doing it I was delaying grief over the loss of all those people whom I just loved and who had given me things over the years. To think that I would get it done in six weeks was delusional, but we made good progress."

No.3 was: Get out of town. She and a girlfriend headed for Spain and Morocco where they managed to enjoy the local culture "without seeing a single bullfight."

The renewal worked. "I didn't feel like I deserved this opportunity," she reflects. "I have so much, and others have so little. It felt very selfish, but it also was clearly necessary to my mental health." She says she learned that renewal can occur even without the benefit of foreign travel. "I learned that if six weeks won't clear out a life, then maybe you can do it just a little bit at a time. Weeding a garden doesn't mean you never have to weed it again."

Edie Olson, president of the Family Service Association, echoes Altmeyer's conclusion. Olson's eight-week renewal program kept her close to home where she scoured freezers and cabinets, organized family pictures, took long walks, and wrote about the two children she and her husband had recently adopted. "I heard about other grant recipients who went swimming with dolphins and traveled to Tuscany for cooking classes and I thought, 'Oh, my gosh, I just stayed home and cleaned closets.' But it was just what I needed," she says.

Olson has reaped the benefits of renewal and passed them along to her staff. So far, four of her colleagues have had similar wonderful experiences.

