

## David Wahl 2013 AAW Honorary Lifetime Member

Clay Foster

### *Is there anything I can do for you? —David Wahl*

If you've known Dave Wahl for very long, these words are familiar. When Dave says them, it's not a perfunctory offhand comment, but a sincere desire to know how he can help. Two of Dave's joys in life are woodturning and helping people. When he can help woodturners, he is in heaven.

That's why Dave Wahl has been chosen as AAW's 2013 Honorary Lifetime Member. His legacy is not

only what he has contributed to the AAW, but also what he has done for the family of woodturning. *Family* is the word Dave uses when talking about the woodturning community.

### **Dedication to the AAW and woodturning**

Dave became interested in woodturning when he accompanied his wife, Suzy, to Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts in

Tennessee. He took a turning class; she took a fibers class. That experience began Dave's relationship with woodturning, woodturners, the AAW, and wood artists. Dave may not have the same notoriety as many of the wood artists who consider him a friend, but his impact on the world of woodturning is just as significant.

The maturation of the AAW from operating out of a cigar box on a card table to the multilevel organization it is ▶



Dave and Suzy Wahl in their "library."

today is the result of initiatives started fifteen years ago by Dave. When the AAW was created, the Board of Directors consisted of nine people who had a passion for woodturning, but who were neophytes at running a nonprofit organization. Hard work and enthusiasm took the association a long way, but eventually changes needed to be made.

to acknowledge that credit for arriving there belongs to a lot of people. His vision of a better way of doing things, though, began the journey.

Dave spearheaded other improvements to the AAW while he was on the Board from 1997 to 2000. Not only did he serve as president for two terms, he wrote and obtained AAW's first corpo-

to get more galleries and museums to show art that has wood elements.

His promotion of woodturning and wood art is tireless. When asked how Dave helped the newly formed Patina Gallery in Santa Fe get involved with wood art, co-owner Allison Barnett said, "The first thing that comes to mind is how David took us into the fold of woodturning.

“ Dave made the demonstrators feel important when he was president. He commented once to me, ‘You can’t have a rock concert without the rock bands. You guys are our rock bands. We need to take care of you.’

—Binh Pho

The AAW was just ten years old when Dave became president of the Board. By that time, the association had outgrown its structure: There had never been a working budget and the profit-and-loss statement being used was not adequate for planning the organization's future. Board member Larry Hasiak took on the herculean task of developing an accrual-basis annual budget when he became Board treasurer. Thanks to Larry's hard work, Board members could track and project the income and expenses of every AAW program and service, and make informed decisions.

Creating the position of executive director was a pivotal event in the history of the AAW. When Dave first came onto the Board in 1997, he recognized that a constantly changing Board made up of volunteer members did not have the time, expertise, and continuity to offer new programs and better services to AAW members. Dave knew it was essential to make the transition from a working board that moved lathes around at the annual symposium to a planning board that set forth goals and created a vision for the organization. With planning, the Board could then charge a professional director to execute their objectives. There were bumps in the road on the long journey to the AAW's current level of a professionally run nonprofit organization, and Dave will be the first

rate sponsorship grant for \$10,000 from the Bank of America for the Charlotte symposium and youth education. He requested that all committee chairs develop and write the duties, responsibilities, procedures, and guidelines for their committees. He asked Board officers to do the same for their positions. During those years, the Board accomplished much internal structuring for the organization because of the cooperation, support, and hard work of everyone involved.

Dave was diligent about taking good care of demonstrators at AAW's yearly symposium. Binh Pho recalls his gracious hospitality: "Dave made the demonstrators feel important when he was president. He commented once to me, 'You can't have a rock concert without the rock bands. You guys are our rock bands. We need to take care of you.'"

### Dave's woodturning family

Many other things Dave did for the woodturning family deserve recognition. He was president of the St. Louis AAW chapter, and helped organize one of the first regional symposiums there. He helped Bill Sullivan start the Woodturners of South West Florida chapter in Fort Myers.

Dave is also a founding member of the Collectors of Wood Art (CWA), and organized the CWA Forum in Santa Fe. As an active CWA member, Dave works

He heard about us opening the gallery and we heard about him through John Jordan. David came into the gallery while the space was under construction and we were setting up. He introduced himself and we made plans to have dinner. During the meal, he and Suzy told us we needed to show wood. We went back to Dave and Suzy's house and they showed us the Wornick Collection book and asked us to pick out work we loved. They then put in a good word for us with the artists. What an entrée they created for us with these artists! He took us under his wing and taught me everything I know about wood. I love the material and I love David. He is one of the most gregarious and open-hearted men I know and I just adore him and his spirit!"

Ivan Barnett, Allison's husband and co-owner of Patina Gallery, recalls that whenever the gallery would have an exhibition of turned art, Dave would attend. Mingling with guests, Dave educated patrons about woodturning. "Do you know how this was done?" he would ask. Or, "This artist lives near here, and her work is influenced by the desert environment. Can you see it?"

Dave played no favorites at a time when competitiveness was at its height among galleries. If a gallery showed turned art, the owners were Dave's friends. He has a talent for deflecting and diffusing conflict among galleries, artists, wood-art

organizations, conference facility managers, and even AAW members.

### Turning wood

An accomplished woodturner in his own right, Dave enjoys making vessels from woods local to him, such as piñon pine. Turned thin, the piñon glows with a warm translucence. Influenced by Ray Key and Bob Stocksdale, Dave prefers simple, clean shapes that don't compete for attention with the color and grain of the wood.

### Hospitality

Dave and Suzy's home is always open to any woodturner, artist, collector, museum director, or a friend of a friend. The Wahl Home For Wayward Artists has been in continual operation for almost

twenty years. There have been times the pillows on the beds barely cooled off before another guest arrived. And there were very few times that a visiting collector, gallery owner, or museum director didn't get a turning lesson in Dave's shop. Dave says, "The most fun about being an AAW member is helping and teaching beginners to turn and seeing the look on their faces at their first success."

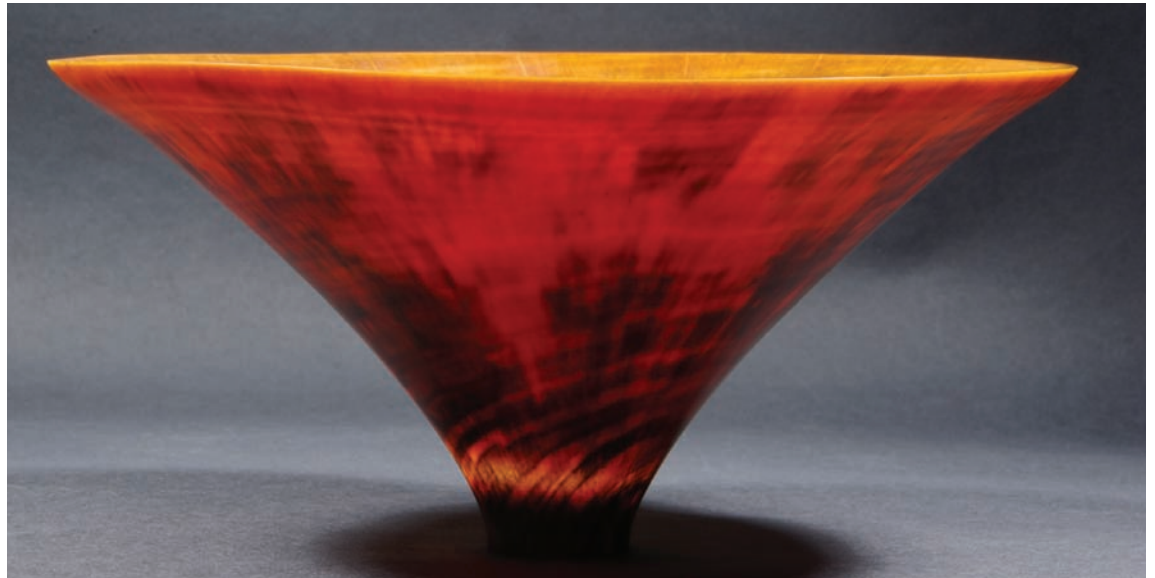
This brings up an oversight: The 2013 recipient of the Honorary Lifetime Member shouldn't be just Dave Wahl; Suzy Wahl completes the package deal. In fact, they should just change their name to *DaveandSuzy*, because that's how friends refer to them. It's a rare occasion to see one without the other. Suzy keeps Dave's exuberance for new adventures grounded in reality, and

Dave is delighted when Suzy raises money for the EOG fund at the annual symposium auction by raising the bid on anything that collector, Arthur Mason is bidding on. Whenever Dave's distinctive laugh can be heard, you know something fun is happening.

Woodturner, wood-art lover, woodturning promoter, and AAW organizer are all words that depict Dave Wahl. But the words that describe him most accurately are: helper and lover of people. And, if you are a woodturner, Dave loves you most of all. He wants to know what he can do to help you. ■

*Clay Foster is a studio artist in Indianapolis, Indiana. He is a former vice president of the AAW and a founding member. He is AAW member #50.*

Sanibel Norfolk Island  
Pine, 4½" × 9½"  
(11cm × 24cm)



(Right) Santa Fe Piñon Pine,  
4" × 7½" (10cm × 19cm)

(Left) Sanibel Norfolk  
Island Pine, 8" × 9"  
(20cm × 23cm)

