



Function beats form for local potter

By Courtney Jones
Council on Culture & Arts

For local ceramicist Gregg Matthews, making pottery is about more than expressing himself artistically. It's about performing a public service. Rather than making one-off works of art, Matthews's focus is functional ware: coffee cups, tumblers, bowls.

"I like people to use the stuff," he said. "There's nothing that validates it more for me than for someone to drink out of something I've made, or eat off something I've made."

Matthews studied computer science and worked for a tech company for many years. Even then, he was drawn to the support aspect of his job.

"I was much more interested in fixing problems and getting people going again than I was interested in inventing something new," he said. "I tried it. I was pretty good at writing code and all that, but it didn't really work for me. I liked working with people that were having a problem and needed a solution."

Matthews took his first pottery class at Florida State University's Center for Participant Education. While there, he met fellow Tallahassee potter Robin Rodgers.



"Before Robin was a local potter, he was there as a student," Matthews said. "He helped me do some things, back when he was just another guy who happened to be at the studio, rather than the impressive artist he is these days."

Matthews, who had previously studied architecture and photography, found pottery to be a form of expression that appealed to many of his interests. He was making something artistic and natural, like his photography, but

three-dimensional, like architecture.

This Saturday, Matthews will be participating in the Tallahassee Clay Arts group's "Dirty Dozen Studio Tour." The tour gives visitors a chance to see some of Tallahassee's clay artists in action by visiting them at their home studios and other locations around town. It gives members of the group, particularly the newer artists, a chance to showcase their work in a casual atmosphere and interact with people.

"There are at least a dozen artists participating, and we all have clay in our blood," said Matthews. "That's the dirty part."

Matthews was a hobbyist potter for decades, and has only recently started to pursue making pottery full-time.

"It kind of transitioned from being more of an avid interest into something I thought I could make a living doing," he said.

The decades spent pursuing pottery as a hobby have prepared Matthews for producing his work in greater numbers.

"I'm much more relaxed about producing now, and satisfied with the pieces that are coming off the wheel," he said. "If I make a hundred of them, I finally get to the point where the 99th and 100th are pretty good."

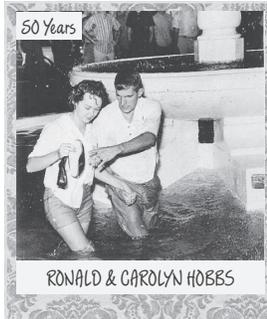
Though the thought of making the same cup a hundred times might not appeal to most, it's one of the aspects Matthews enjoys about his work, and he finds the process soothing rather than tiring.

"The repetition lets me refine my work to the point where I can finally make that really good one," he said. "And it's OK with me if it takes a hundred tries to get there; that doesn't bother me. If I make one really good

one, that makes me want to make a dozen more."

"It's like waves rolling in on the beach. Sure, every wave is different, but after a thousand of them, every wave's kind of the same. And they're all beautiful."

Courtney Jones is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts, COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture. For more information visit www.cocanet.org



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IF YOU GO

What: Tallahassee Clay Arts' Dirty Dozen Studio Tour
When: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday
Where: Various locations around Tallahassee and Woodville
Contact: Visit tallyclayarts.com for locations and times

