

Vividly etched

Engraver draws appointment as state's first artist laureate

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ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

When Evan Lindquist got a call from the governor's office, he thought it was a prank.

Someone was asking the Jonesboro artist to fill out some forms for the position of artist laureate. "I had never heard of an artist laureate. I didn't know what was happening," he said. But he did as he was asked.

It was no prank. On Aug. 27, Gov. Mike Beebe appointed Lindquist, a printmaker and retired professor, as the first Arkansas Artist Laureate. He'll serve for a four-year term.

Laureate. Its Latin root means to be crowned with laurels. Nobel Prize winners are called laureates. The ancient Romans and Greeks crowned their poets and heroes with a wreath of fresh laurel leaves, symbolizing victory. The makings for one are in most kitchens: laurus

nobilis, the bay leaf.

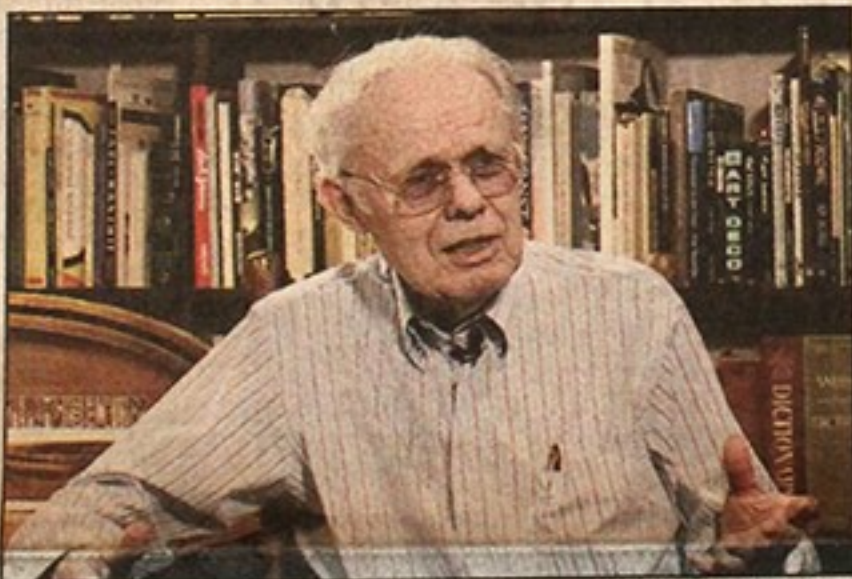
Lindquist didn't get a crown of laurel leaves, but he did get a very nice certificate, which is reprinted on his website. It explains that the governor authorizes and empowers "this person to execute and fulfill the duties of that office according to law."

Ancient poets laureate were expected to compose poems for special occasions. The U.S. poet laureate, appointed each year, is expected to give one poetry reading and one public lecture.

Lindquist consulted House Bill 1209 to find out what his duties are.

The bill, sponsored by Rep. John Hutchison, R-Harrisburg, aims "to support the fine arts by authorizing the governor to designate an artist laureate." It

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Evan Lindquist, Arkansas' first artist laureate, created a series of show-and-tell videos on YouTube. Lindquist also is professor emeritus of art at Arkansas State University.

Laureate

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was filed in January and enacted in February.

It explains the title is honorary, "in recognition of outstanding accomplishments and contributions in art by a person who is a resident of the state of Arkansas." There are no official duties and no budget.

Lindquist isn't going to rest on his laurels, though. "I take this very seriously," he said. "I need to do an honorable job of creating art, promoting art."

More than two months after the announcement, Lindquist is still incredulous, and humbled.

"One thing that really makes me feel very honored to receive that award was the fact that there are so many artists, musicians, actors, writers, so many people in Arkansas who follow their creative kind of the arts, and I just can't get over the fact that I've been selected to represent all of those people. I mean, how can I be as good as any of those musicians or any of the actors or any of the painters?"

"Then at the same time I stop and think how many students at my university would come up to me and say, 'You know, I wanted to major in art but my parents wouldn't let me because they said there wasn't enough money in it. This brings home to me the fact that by honoring the arts, it is saying that there is something very important about the arts. ... And that makes me feel important because I want to bring that home to the students who are really not sure if they should go into the arts.'"

Lindquist came to Arkansas after being urged by someone who had never been here.

His art is a specific and very old kind of printmaking called burin engraving. He sketches a design on paper, then uses a burin (a slender steel chisel with a wooden handle) to etch the drawing on a copper plate. At various stages he rolls ink on the plate and makes a print on paper. One drawing may go through 25 of these cycles before he calls it done. Then he will make about 40 prints for sale, and add his signature. The process for one print takes about three months.

The Kansas native got in-



Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/HELAINE WILLIAMS

Peggy Vining, Arkansas' poet laureate (with her daughter Suzanne Kunkel), attended a Reach Out and Read benefit in October. Vining has been poet laureate since 2003.

terested in burin engraving in the 1950s and went to the University of Iowa to study with Mauricio Lasansky, "the pre-eminent engraver printmaker of the 20th century." When Lindquist was completing his master of fine arts degree, Arkansas State College (now University) at Jonesboro was looking for a teacher.

"Before I came down here I knew Arkansas was interested in the arts," he said. "Every time we sent exhibitions down to Arkansas, things would sell. When this job opened up, Lasansky said, 'I want you to go down and take that job because Arkansas is a really great place.'"

"He had never been here, but he knew that things were happening in the arts."

Lindquist taught at ASU for 40 years, 1963-2003. He also found time to work at his craft. His work is in the permanent collections of dozens of museums, including major museums in Boston, Chicago, Dallas and New York, and the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, Italy. His work found its way to galleries in Austria, Ireland,



Democrat-Gazette file photo

The late W. Francis McBeth, who was Arkansas' composer laureate, died in 2012. Born in Texas, McBeth specialized in composing music for wind ensembles.

Denmark, Spain and Iran. The Arkansas Arts Center owns 200 to 300 of his prints. Six are displayed in the atrium, in the exhibition "Interwoven: Paper," which ends today.

Lindquist still teaches, in a different sort of classroom. He has gotten emails from artists in the United States

and abroad — sometimes in foreign languages — asking him how to do this or that. Showing is better than telling, and a video can reach more people than the original writer, so he has made six show-and-tell videos, listed at tinyurl.com/lvxnqfg.

Now in his 80s, Lindquist spends the bulk of his days working. He gets to the studio by 7 or 8 a.m. and works until 9 or 10 p.m. His wife, a former silversmith and weaver, works at her own drawings.

He takes three breaks to walk his Tibetan terrier. Her name? "My wife spells it Dolly, but I spell it Dali."

Some other states have artists laureate. Louisiana's is George Rodrigue, known for his blue dog paintings. Texas has had a State Artist since the 1970s; since 1990, they've designated two, for two-dimensional art and three-dimensional art.

COMPOSURE

Arkansas again displayed its commitment to the arts in 1975 when Gov. David Pryor named the first composer laureate in the nation. Francis McBeth spent his career at Ouachita Baptist University in Arkadelphia, starting in 1957 as band director and retiring in 1996 as chairman of the music theory and composition department and resident composer.

He conducted the Arkansas All-State band in 1962, when Bill Clinton was a student in the saxophone section. McBeth was conductor of the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra in 1971-1973. It was under his baton that the orchestra began hiring full-time professional musicians. McBeth died in early 2012.

BAY LEAVES FOR BARDS

England has had poets laureate since the 1600s. The United States has had them since 1937, although "poet laureate" wasn't added to the title until 1985. The title itself has more syllables than a haiku: Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress.

The national position comes with a \$35,000 stipend. The only duties are to give one reading and one lecture; poets are encouraged to work on their own projects during their association with the library. But most recent poets laureate have used the platform to increase awareness and appreciation of poetry.

■ **Billy Collins**, 2001-2003 po-



Thought by Evan Lindquist, 1970

Courtesy of Evan Lindquist

Arkansas artist laureate Evan Lindquist titled this etching *Thought*.

et laureate, created a program to make poetry user-friendly in high schools.

■ **Kay Ryan**, the 2008-2010 poet laureate, toured the country reading and talking about the work of Emily Dickinson.

■ The current U.S. poet laureate is **Natasha Trethewey**, a Mississippi native who teaches at Emory University in Atlanta.

PEGGY VINING

Arkansas has had poets laureate for 90 years (see accompanying story). The first few held the titles for life, but since 1970, each sitting governor has had the prerogative to appoint one.

Peggy Sue Caudle Vining of Little Rock has served since 2003. Like Lindquist, the appointment took her by surprise — especially since she was good friends with Verna Lee Hinegardner, the poet she was replacing.

What are her duties? "I asked the same question when I became poet laureate," she said. "I was told it was an honor position and there was nothing I had to do unless I chose to."

Vining decided on her duties — "to promote literacy in Arkansas and the literary arts that are available" — and has tried to carry that out by doing what she had done for years: staying active in the Arkansas Poets Roundtable, serving on the boards of the Ozark Writers Conference and Arkansas Writers Conference, and talking to students when she's invited. She also

attends annual meetings of all the state poets laureate, on her own dime.

She taught before she had her five children and resumed teaching once they were in school. Vining estimates she taught more than 6,000 children in elementary school in her 35 years of teaching. "My expertise is with young children," she said. "That's where the love of learning begins and the love of literacy begins." Children that age also don't get to experience visiting speakers as often as older kids do.

Vining began writing poetry when her five children were young and her husband traveled for his job. "I was hunting for something to do in my spare time," she said. "I would write at night."

Inspiration often struck when she was ironing her four daughters' dresses. "I found out that there was rhythm in the ironing and rhythm in the poetry," she said. "Sometimes a whole poem would come and I'd jot it down before I forgot it."

She has published in many places, and is working on a self-published collection of her poems, illustrated by one of her daughters. She's probably best known for her award-winning poem "Arkansas, The Natural State." A copy of it was put in a time capsule under Little Rock City Hall.

Does inspiration still come at the ironing board?

"I'm wash-and-wear now," she said. "I haven't ironed in years."

State's poets laureate total 5 plus 1 interim in 90 years

In 90 years, Arkansas has had just five poets laureate and one interim. In all cases but one, the poet has held the position until death.

The position was established Oct. 10, 1923, when both houses of the Arkansas Legislature passed resolutions calling for its creation. Since the 1970s, it has been the prerogative of each new governor to appoint a poet laureate.

■ **Charles T. Davis** (1923-1945). Davis was born and raised in Dardanelle. He worked as a secretary to Rep. Henderson Jacoway, then went to work at the *Arkansas Gazette*, which also published his poems weekly. He

published two collections of those poems.

■ **Rosa Zagnoni Marinoni** (1953-1970). Marinoni was born in Italy but moved at age 10 to Brooklyn, N.Y. She moved to Fayetteville as a newlywed. She founded a poetry club whose members read and critiqued each other's work; it met in her home for 45 years. Her promotion of poetry in schools, women's groups and newspapers influenced the 1948 designation of Oct. 15 as annual Poetry Day. She was prolific, publishing poems and stories in roughly 1,000 publications, turning out 19 books and publishing a series on Ozark humor and folklore.

■ **Ercil Brown**, interim appointee (1970-1971). When Marinoni died, the Legislature wasn't in session, so Gov. Winthrop Rockefeller appointed Brown as interim. Three nominees were put forth. Instead of choosing one, the Legislature passed the buck by passing a law making it the governor's job to choose.

■ **Lily Peter** (1971-1991). Peter was 80 when Gov. Dale Bumpers appointed her poet laureate, and she'd already lived a fuller life than many. She had become a millionaire through savvy management of two family farms, having taken on much responsibility

for the first at age 16 after her father died. She received a master's degree at Vanderbilt University at Nashville, Tenn., studied violin at the Juilliard School in New York and used her wealth to support and promote the arts.

She subsidized college educations and donated the funds for a community auditorium in Helena. Most memorably, she financed two concerts by the Philadelphia Orchestra in Robinson Center Music Hall, including their travel. Her poetic oeuvre includes an epic poem about explorer Hernando De Soto.

■ **Verna Lee Hinegardner** (1991-2003). Illinois native and

Hot Springs poet Hinegardner was appointed by onetime Hot Springs resident Gov. Bill Clinton. She was 9 when her first poem was published. Her contribution to poetic forms is the minute, a 60-syllable, 12-line poem about a slice of life. Hinegardner was active in national poetry organizations as well as the state's, and she entered and won contests throughout her life. She edited a poetry column for the *Hot Springs Sentinel-Record* and also held a job with the U.S. Forest Service.

She was still living when a new laureate was appointed by Gov. Mike Huckabee, who apparently did not know Hin-

egardner still held the position. This made her the state's first and so far only poet laureate emeritus. She regained a title of sorts, at the age of 92, when one of her poems won a national contest. The win brought with it the honorary title of 2011 Arkansas Senior Poet Laureate. Hinegardner died in October 2012.

■ **Peggy Sue Caudle Vining** (2003-present). Vining was appointed by Huckabee and reappointed in 2007 by Gov. Mike Beebe. The Tennessee native has been active in many state writing organizations and directed two writers conferences after a career as a teacher.

— Laura Lynn Brown