

Miller gift creates Robert C. Turner Chair in Ceramic Art

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Decades-old bonds of friendship and respect reconnected in a new way at Alfred University's Honors Convocation earlier this month as the University announced creation of its first-ever endowed professorship in the School of Art & Design, the Robert C. Turner Chair in Ceramic Art, and bestowed it on D. Wayne Higby, professor of ceramic art. The chair is one of six for the School of Art & Design that will be funded by the proceeds of a \$25 million endowment for the arts created with a gift from Marlin and Ginger Miller. The creation of the Robert C. Turner Chair in Ceramic Art is the culmination of something that began in the early 1970s when Turner was a professor of ceramic art, Higby was a new faculty member, and Miller, a 1954 alumnus of Alfred University, became a member of the AU Board of Trustees. "Bob Turner was chair of the Ceramic Art department, and I was a young trustee," recalled Miller at a celebratory dinner honoring Marlin and Ginger Miller, Bob and Sue Turner, and Wayne Higby. "We worked together on the Bridges of Tomorrow campaign," and thus began the friendship between the two. "When it came time to name the first endowed chair, there was only one person to name it for: Bob Turner." Higby, who joined the faculty in 1973, grew to admire Turner as a teacher, an artist and a friend. Soon after his arrival in Alfred, he met Miller and his wife, the late Marcianne Mapel Miller, who was a 1955 alumna of AU with a BFA in ceramic art. The Millers took an interest in his art, beginning what Higby calls a "rare friendship" that has endured for more than 30 years. When Higby learned that the Millers' gift would establish the Turner Chair, and that he had been selected as the first holder of that professorship, "I was truly stunned," he said. The creation of the first endowed chair for the School of Art & Design is, according to Higby, "a time to celebrate ceramic art at Alfred University, the great and glorious legacy. It's a time to celebrate belief, creativity, service and the potential of youth. I will do my best to bring distinction to the Robert C. Turner Chair in Ceramic Art." "It is an honor" to be part of this, to be here," Turner said. "It's rejuvenating to feel the remarkable kind of spirit we have here. I'm delighted to be a part of it." "We honor Marlin and Ginger Miller for the generosity that makes the Robert C. Turner Chair in Ceramic Art possible," said Joseph S. Lewis III, dean of the School of Art & Design. The Millers' leadership, vision and philanthropy "will transform Alfred University and the School of Art & Design." An engineer who holds an MBA from Harvard University, Miller was founder, president and chief executive of Arrow International. The Millers are well-known collectors and patrons of the arts. "We honor Professor Turner for inspiring, through his art and through his teaching, generations of artists," said Lewis. A 1949 AU alumnus who earned his Master of Fine Arts degree in Ceramic Art, Turner taught in the ceramic art department of the School of Art & Design for 21 years, until his retirement in 1979. He brought international acclaim to Alfred University as a Fellow of the American Craft Council and as a recipient of its highest award, the Gold Medal. He is member of the International Academy of Ceramics, and an honorary member and past president of the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts. He also received a State University of New York Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching. Alfred University honored him with a Binns Medal for "High Achievement in the Field of Ceramic Art." Like Turner, Higby is the recipient of a SUNY Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching; received the Board of Governors' Distinguished Educator Award from the James Renwick Alliance; was named a "Master Teacher" by the University of Hartford; and just the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts' highest honor. He is also an honorary professor at Shanghai University; honorary president of the San Bao International Ceramic Institute, which he helped to found; and was named an honorary citizen of Jingdezhen, China, for his efforts to use art as a common language, linking Alfred to Jingdezhen, the U.S. to China. Also like Turner, Higby is an internationally acclaimed artist. The American Crafts Movement honored him as one of seven artists whom it called "genuine living legends representing the best of American artists." He is vice president of the International Academy of Ceramics. Earlier this month, the James Renwick Alliance presented its Board of Governors' Master of the Media Award to Higby, during a weekend-long celebration of American Craft Masters.