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*Democracy Dies in Darkness*

# Human Resources

Four area artisans who bring life to a home or garden

By Karen Tanaka  
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Winnie Owens-Hart

Ceramicist

From small round pots five inches in diameter to tall water jars that she sometimes makes into drums, Winnie Owens-Hart's ceramics reflect the African pottery-making tradition. Born at Howard University Hospital -- then called Freedmen's Hospital -- Owens-Hart now teaches ceramics at Howard. She has studied early American ceramics, and has been teaching for almost 30 years, but she has been most influenced by her stays in Nigeria. She works in the style of Ipetumodu, a Nigerian village that has been a pottery center for centuries. Using this 500-year-old technique, she builds a pot up with coils of clay, then pulls the sides up with a gourd or shell. She mixes her own red clay and smoke-fires her pots at a low temperature; the resulting colors range from dull reds to shiny blacks. She avoids trying to produce identical pieces, concerned about preserving what she calls "the uniqueness of the handmade object." She adds, "I have not abandoned the beauty of utilitarian objects." Winnie Owens-Hart, 703-754-1307; e-mail wowens-hart@juno.com.

Ronnie Smith

Roofer and Sheet Metal Worker

Clear Skies is the name of Ronnie Smith's company, but the weather shouldn't matter after he's visited. He works on projects as large as an entire copper roof and as small as a planter box liner. He grew up in Riggs Park, in Northeast Washington, and started out working as a sheet metal apprentice. The most high-profile job he has worked on was at the White House. (When then-President Ronald Reagan came in and out of the building, the Secret Service would have Smith leave the roof.) "I think of myself as an artist," says Smith, who recently went into business for himself. "My work" -- even if it might be only the flashing -- "is hanging in the most prestigious places in the city." Ronnie Smith, 301-864-1477.

Martha Jackson Jarvis

Garden Environmental Artist

Her Mount Rainier studio looks like a sculptor's playroom. Martha Jackson-Jarvis works surrounded by thousands of brightly colored pieces of mosaic tile and glass, bales large and small of wire, rocks and stones, wood, clay and the makings of cement. Jackson-Jarvis makes mosaics and sculpture, some pieces scaled for private gardens, others for large public

projects. The scope of a recent project -- commissioned by Prince George's County -- ranged from hammering and chiseling tiny mosaic tiles to installing wall sculptures weighing some 800 pounds each. For smaller gardens, she makes ornamental fencing, water jars and mosaic walls. Her ideal projects, she says, are those that involve designing all the structures and plantings in a given garden to "invent something for a space that people live in and love." Martha Jackson-Jarvis, 301-277-8852.

Bill Butler

Framer

Bill Butler got his start in the framing business as an apprentice in Arlington back in 1968. In 1990 he bought Thomas Moore Associates, a well-established Adams-Morgan frame shop whose owner was retiring. Now known as Archival Art Services, it handles three-dimensional display and crating as well as matting and framing of archival quality, often for museums and galleries. Along the way Butler developed a tool called Matline, for measuring and marking mats. He and his staff of six have framed the Emancipation Proclamation for the National Archives, a dinosaur bone and innumerable kindergarteners' drawings. The shop provides a museum standard of framing, and that means that everything is preserved in its original condition. If you ask Butler to trim the edges off your 6-year-old's finger-painting masterpiece, he will hand you the scissors, but he won't alter the work himself. Anything less, he says, "is an injustice to the piece." Archival Art Services, 2412-Rear 18th St. NW, 202-667-3575.