

Handed Down

Twenty Years of Missouri's Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program

From songs and dance steps to rituals, crafts and tools, Missouri's traditional arts have been identified, documented and presented since 1984 through a partnership between the Missouri Arts Council (MAC) and the University of Missouri, with substantial funding from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA).

In June 1983, Bess Lomax Hawes, then-director of Folk Arts at the NEA, announced a state folk arts apprenticeship pilot program and sent out a call for grant applications

to state arts councils around the country. Missouri Arts Council staff approached MU's Cultural Heritage Center to "investigate the possibilities for participating in this program," and, within the year, Missouri became one of fifteen states to establish an apprenticeship program. In the first year, Missouri paid exemplary master artists fifty dollars a lesson to pass on their traditions to promising apprentices for fourteen weeks. Today, master artists are paid a \$2,000 honorarium to work on a weekly basis with apprentices for periods of six to nine months.

In its first year, the Folk Apprenticeship Program (as it was initially named) focused on Missouri's musical traditions and sponsored ten apprenticeships in old-time fiddle, African-American gospel song, button box accordion and jazz violin. In the second year, the twelve apprenticeships were nearly equally divided between music traditions and crafts (saddles, chairs, woven coverlets, baskets, cabinets and blacksmithing).

Since then, over five hundred individual traditional artists, many in underserved rural, inner city and ethnic communities, have participated in what has come to be known as the Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program (TAAP). Master artists and their apprentices hail from every corner of the state.

In 1992, the Museum of Art & Archaeology assumed administration of the Missouri Folk Arts Program, which provides folk arts services throughout the state, including the Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program.



In 1985, the very first year of Missouri's apprenticeship program, master old-time fiddler Taylor McBaine works with his apprentice, Barbara Dutton. McBaine, who passed away in 1994, is remembered today with the Taylor McBaine Memorial Fiddlers Reunion, Contest and Barn Dance, which is held each September in Columbia.



Master white oak basketmaker Marjorie Westfall Prewitt instructs her apprentice and nephew, Ron Westfall, in the selection of wood for their basket project in 1985.

Program Milestones, 1984-2003:

152 Master Artists awarded apprenticeships

63 Master Artists selected 2 or more times

15 Master Artists selected 5 or more times

12 Apprentices achieve Master Artist awards

302 Apprenticeships funded
(143 Music;
111 Crafts;
28 Dance;
14 Narrative;
6 Other)



In 1987, master Helen Jeffrey showed her apprentice Jean Amedori, pictured below, how to finish a braided rug. Like many master artists, Jeffrey far exceeded the proposed number of lessons, quadrupling the time she mapped out in her original lesson plan.



Saengphet Louangphom, above left, Master *kaen* player. The *kaen* is a raft-shaped free-reed instrument traditionally used to accompany Laotian singing. Saengphet learned the *kaen* from his father and, after high school, played in the elite Lao National Academy of Performing Arts. In 1986, Saengphet and his apprentice were the first 'New Immigrants' to be awarded an apprenticeship in Missouri.



Master blues guitarist and NEA Heritage Fellow Henry Townsend, right, works with apprentice Johnny Allen in 1995. Townsend is considered a living legend and patriarch of the St. Louis blues. In 1999, he was featured in *A Blues Life: Henry Townsend as Told to Bill Greensmith*, published by the University of Illinois Press.