

Mary Mazziotti

The 57-year-old visual artist employs ingenuity as well as creativity in her work by searching diligently for programs to further develop her craft. Using an Endowments-funded Greater Pittsburgh Artist Opportunity Grant of \$1,200 that she received last year, Mazziotti participated in the Sydney Olympic Park Residency Program in Australia.



Thanks to foundation support, more artists, like suit-clad corporate employees, are signing up for professional training.

Because many don't have the money to pay for programs to improve their craft, philanthropies in Pittsburgh and elsewhere are stepping in to cover the bill.

by Monica Haynes photography by Karen Meyers

individual investment

Mary Mazziotti walks over to the bookcase in her Pittsburgh studio and picks up a round plastic container with a taupe-colored lid. It's the kind that might normally hold leftover peas or chicken salad. However, in this instance it is filled with clear glass beads bearing the numbers 1 to 122 painted in red.

She takes a few beads out and scatters them along the baseboards to demonstrate how she plans to use them in a future installation. The numbers represent the human life span from one year to the age of the oldest person on record.

"You see a random number and pick it up. Any of those numbers could be your number," she explains.



More precisely, any of them could be when your number is up, according to the current theme of Mazziotti's work. It's called "memento mori," a genre of art that started in classical Greece and Rome and is intended to remind people of their mortality.

"All through history, you'll find artwork that has references to death," Mazziotti says. "That is to remind you to either seize the day or repent."

The 57-year-old visual artist, who works in a variety of media from acrylic paint on panels to embroidered textiles, spends two to three hours a day perusing the Internet for

opportunities to seize: jury shows, galleries, residencies. One that she availed herself of last year was the Greater Pittsburgh Artist Opportunity Grant awarded by the Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council and funded by The Heinz Endowments.

Mazziotti used the \$1,200 she received to participate in the Sydney Olympic Park Residency Program in Australia. "[The Artist Opportunity grant] is one of the very few out there that gives money to individual artists," she says.

As arts groups and venues across the country grapple with attracting patrons during an economic downturn, individual artists often feel the financial pinch more acutely as they try to

Cathleen Richardson Bailey

Last year, writer and visual artist Cathleen Richardson Bailey spent a week at a writers' conference at Ghost Ranch in New Mexico being inspired by the landscape that inspired painter Georgia O'Keefe.

"From the time I got there it was just an amazing boost to me and my writing career," Bailey says. It's a chance she never would have received without philanthropic support that included a \$670 Greater Pittsburgh Artist Opportunity Grant.

While at the conference, Bailey was encouraged by two people she met to apply for fine arts graduate programs. She did and was accepted into the Master of Fine Arts program at the University of Southern Maine, where she is studying creative writing. It's a "low-residency" program that requires students to visit the Maine campus only twice a year for in-depth workshops. In the meantime, each student is paired with an instructor for one-on-one exchanges via telephone and e-mail.

"This is something I've always wanted to pursue," she says.

The 57-year-old artist, who grew up on Pittsburgh's North Side and now lives in the city's Homewood neighborhood, has written stories since she was a little girl. But her life took a different artistic path, she says, and she pursued beadwork, quilting and doll making, which she teaches. Last year, Bailey, a mother of four adult daughters, returned to the University of Pittsburgh to finish her undergraduate degree.

"I'm largely a self-taught artist so I've dealt with a lot of self-doubt," she says.

However, the encouragement she received at the writers' retreat and the support of the local artist community have buoyed her spirits and fueled her enthusiasm to complete a collection of short stories she's writing.

"Pittsburgh is a small town," Bailey says, "but the arts community rallies around people who are professional, who are bold, who are fearless about their art, who are interested in sharing their art."

generate income from their work. Although the idea of the struggling artist is not new, it can include hardships such as being unable to afford opportunities to further nurture creative skills—even while receiving praise for cultural contributions.

In a 1963 speech given in honor of the late poet Robert Frost, President John F. Kennedy declared, "I see little of more importance to the future of our country and our civilization than full recognition of the place of the artist."

Janet Sarbaugh, senior director of the Endowments' Arts & Culture Program, describes artists as "the bedrock of community cultural life."

"Without them, we have no fuel for our many cultural institutions," she says.

In a recently released National Endowment for the Arts report titled "Artists in the Workforce 1995–2005," Dan Gioia, the organization's chairman, writes: "The time has come to insist on an obvious but overlooked fact—artists are workers. They make things and perform services, just like other workers, and these goods and services have value—not merely in lofty spiritual terms but also in dollars and cents."

Artists contribute not only to the cultural vitality of the country, he says, but also to its economic prosperity.

Despite these endorsements, individual artists have had their share of difficulties over the last two decades trying to gain support. The "culture wars" of the 1990s that drew the arts into political debates about values and morality also led Congress to enact legislation that eliminated NEA funding for individual artists except for its literature and translation fellowships and lifetime achievement honors.

It was partly in response to Congress's 1995 action that private philanthropic groups began to examine how to fill the void. Organizations such as LINC—Leveraging Investments in Creativity—and the Creative Capital Foundation were created around this time, and the Urban Institute report "Investing in Creativity" was commissioned.

The Endowments' Arts & Culture Program staff also began looking at ways to broaden the foundation's vision for arts giving.

"We realized that our definition of a vibrant arts 'ecology' had to include local individual artists," Sarbaugh says.

The foundation opted to support the artists by working primarily through intermediaries such as the Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts in Amherst, Va., rather than develop the staffing and administrative structures that would have been needed to fund artists directly. Still, that decision placed the Endowments among the few foundations in the region to make financial support consistently available for individual artists. So far, it has provided funding to nearly 200 artists by awarding roughly \$2.2 million in grants to current and former intermediaries.

Patrick Jordan, an actor, producer and artistic director of the Pittsburgh theater company barebones productions, says he's

benefited from such collaborations. He received a \$1,000 Artist Opportunity grant from the arts council to travel to Edinburgh, Scotland, and perform in the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, touted as the largest arts festival in the world.

“There are companies from 40-plus different countries,” Jordan says. “I did a lot of networking while I was there. I saw 30, 40 different shows. Some of them were new works that I plan on producing in Pittsburgh, which is one of the more exciting things.”

Since the Seattle-based Grantmakers in the Arts held its first annual conference in 1985, the organization has promoted giving to individual artists and encouraging ideas

The Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation, an Endowments grantee, offers fellowships for residencies to two artists from each of its member states, which include Pennsylvania, Washington, D.C., New Jersey and New York. The foundation also gives an annual cash award to a jazz master in the mid-Atlantic region. At the national level, the Multi-Arts Production Fund, established by the Rockefeller Foundation in 1988 and administered by the Creative Capital Foundation, assists individual artists in developing live performance projects.

The Pennsylvania Council on the Arts awards individual artists fellowships annually ranging from \$5,000 to \$10,000. And support in the Pittsburgh region includes \$10,000 grants

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Janet Sarbaugh, senior director, The Heinz Endowments’ Arts & Culture Program

for how that can be done, says Anne Focke, the organization’s executive director.

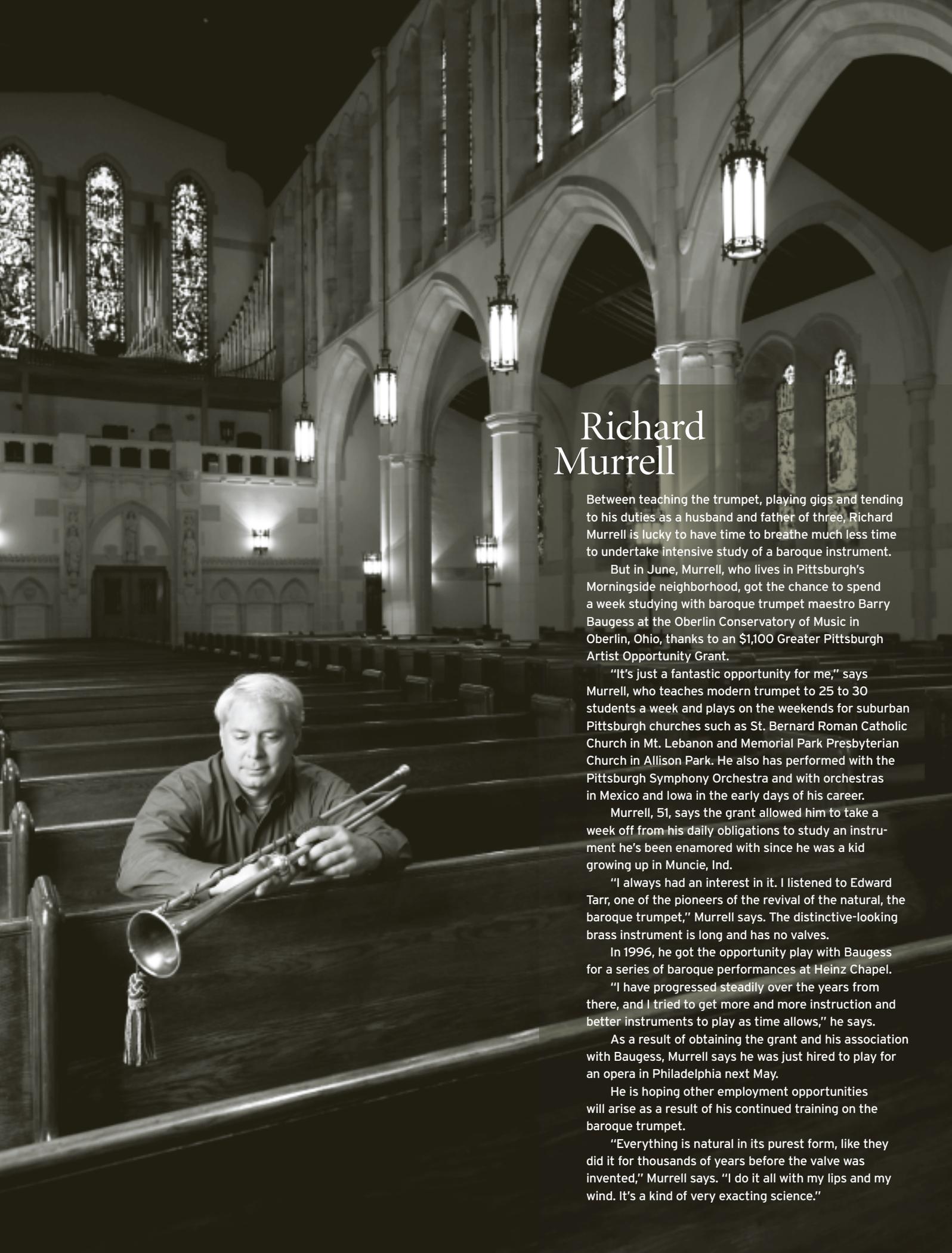
“I think that over the years, giving tended to be to non-profit arts institutions, but giving to artists is [one of] the themes that among GIA members has been important from the start,” she says.

And the ways organizations support artists range broadly, Focke notes. The Artists Trust in Seattle, for example, was formed by a group of artists and arts supporters more than 20 years ago and has granted \$3.1 million directly to 1,400 Washington state artists. As a coalition of several arts foundations in the San Francisco bay area, the Creative Work Fund supports collaborations between artists and arts organizations to create new work.

from The Pittsburgh Foundation, via an anonymous donor, to three or four local artists. The foundation also funds arts organizations.

The Heinz family’s interest and support of arts and culture dates back to before the formation of the first Heinz endowment in the 1940s. The mission initially focused on funding major cultural institutions and Pittsburgh’s downtown Cultural District, but later broadened to include the support of artists and the organizations that make their work possible. In 1998, the Endowments began an in-depth review of how it could best serve individual artists.

“One of the first things we did was talk to artists about what they needed,” Sarbaugh says. “One of the things they said they wanted was an opportunity to learn about their field.” That included traveling to other places to present their work, training with master artists and participating in residencies.



Richard Murrell

Between teaching the trumpet, playing gigs and tending to his duties as a husband and father of three, Richard Murrell is lucky to have time to breathe much less time to undertake intensive study of a baroque instrument.

But in June, Murrell, who lives in Pittsburgh's Morningside neighborhood, got the chance to spend a week studying with baroque trumpet maestro Barry Baugess at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music in Oberlin, Ohio, thanks to an \$1,100 Greater Pittsburgh Artist Opportunity Grant.

"It's just a fantastic opportunity for me," says Murrell, who teaches modern trumpet to 25 to 30 students a week and plays on the weekends for suburban Pittsburgh churches such as St. Bernard Roman Catholic Church in Mt. Lebanon and Memorial Park Presbyterian Church in Allison Park. He also has performed with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra and with orchestras in Mexico and Iowa in the early days of his career.

Murrell, 51, says the grant allowed him to take a week off from his daily obligations to study an instrument he's been enamored with since he was a kid growing up in Muncie, Ind.

"I always had an interest in it. I listened to Edward Tarr, one of the pioneers of the revival of the natural, the baroque trumpet," Murrell says. The distinctive-looking brass instrument is long and has no valves.

In 1996, he got the opportunity play with Baugess for a series of baroque performances at Heinz Chapel.

"I have progressed steadily over the years from there, and I tried to get more and more instruction and better instruments to play as time allows," he says.

As a result of obtaining the grant and his association with Baugess, Murrell says he was just hired to play for an opera in Philadelphia next May.

He is hoping other employment opportunities will arise as a result of his continued training on the baroque trumpet.

"Everything is natural in its purest form, like they did it for thousands of years before the valve was invented," Murrell says. "I do it all with my lips and my wind. It's a kind of very exacting science."

“Artists don’t often get a chance to remove themselves from the day-to-day and reconnect with the kind of immersion in being an artist that allows a lot of ideas to flow,” explains Susan Blackman, director of arts programs for the Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council, which has received \$131,000 from the Endowments since 2004. What the arts council panel looks for in awarding the Artist Opportunity grant, Blackman says, is an experience that would not otherwise be available to the artist.

The Virginia Center for the Creative Arts came to the Endowments’ attention after Craig Pleasants, the center’s

“[The artists] just do whatever they think is important for them to do,” says Pleasants. “It’s just very concentrated time, and what happens is they get a momentum going. Because of that momentum, they just get more work done and more high-quality work done.”

He estimates that it costs between \$135 and \$160 per day for an artist to attend the center, which has an annual budget of \$1 million. Artists who are not being funded are asked to contribute \$40 a day to defray the costs. Some are able to pay and some are not, he says.

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Susan Blackman, director of arts programs, Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council

program director, served on a panel for the foundation’s Arts & Culture Program. Pleasants told Sarbaugh about the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation’s funding of residencies at the center for New Jersey artists. Sarbaugh and Endowments staff thought the residency program would be a good fit for western Pennsylvania artists as well.

In the past four years, the Endowments has given a total of \$152,500 to support two-week residencies at the Virginia center for artists from the Pittsburgh region. The center provides living and work space, meals and an environment conducive to productivity, and can accommodate 23 artists at a time. That number normally includes 10 visual artists, 10 writers and three composers.

Barbara Weissberger, who was a resident at the center last year, agrees that the conditions there make it easier for artists to nurture their craft. “The setting is bucolic, so there’s a lot about it that’s geared toward giving you time, space and environment to focus on work.”

Another benefit of the residency is the camaraderie that develops among participants, says the 47-year-old visual artist, who moved to Pittsburgh from Hoboken, N.J., six years ago.

“You start to have very fruitful conversations about your own work, the work of others, cultural issues in general that impact your work. . . .It’s a very organic thing. It’s not forced.”

Sarbaugh says it’s this kind of feedback that lets her know that the Endowments’ relatively small investment has provided big returns in terms of the positive impact on artists. “For many artists, it’s been really important to their careers and their sense that they can live and work in Pittsburgh and succeed.” *h*