

The Case for Support

Executive Summary

Recognized by the legislature as the official birthplace of North Carolina traditional pottery, the Seagrove area of North Carolina lays claim to a rich history where family, community, and clay have been interwoven for generations. It is in this area that pottery making has continued uninterrupted for over 200 years, and today this area is home to over 100 potters who continue and add to the tradition.

In 1983, a group of Seagrove potters and residents saw the value of their region's rich history and feared that the vast knowledge and skill would be lost. Consequently, the group founded the Museum of North Carolina Traditional Pottery to preserve and promote the history of their craft in Seagrove and the surrounding area and to support the living and breathing potters who work there today.

Since it began, the Museum's staff has successfully sustained the pottery tradition through its annual festival and events, but all along the group has searched for a permanent home. Fortunately, the Museum recently acquired a large grocery store and adjacent house that when renovated will display historic traditional ware, demonstrate the work of local potters, offer a coffee shop, and include a tourist information center.

To bring the Museum to life, the organization's Board of Directors has approved a \$2 million strategic plan for capital improvements and creation of a permanent endowment. Capital funds will complete renovation of the grocery store and house, and endowment funds will be used to maintain the building, purchase rare traditional pottery, and support new educational and outreach programs. The result will be a vibrant tourist destination that contributes to the area's reputation as the state's "pottery capital."

A Centuries Old Tradition

Located approximately 40 miles south of Greensboro, Seagrove is a small community in Randolph County in the center of North Carolina's Piedmont. The Seagrove pottery community includes portions of Randolph, Moore, Montgomery, Lee, and Chatham counties. It is in these communities that a rich tradition began more than 200 years ago.

Seagrove's tradition of creating functional ware from the rich local clay began around 1750. In the early years, Seagrove potters crafted almost solely utilitarian glazed earthenware and stoneware – churns, jars for food storage, milk crocks, whiskey jugs and kitchenware. Sometimes they added some decoration, and then fired the ware in handmade kilns. While much 18th and 19th century pottery was created for a potter's family and community, it was also sold from covered wagons traveling slowly throughout the state.

By the early 20th century, however, mass produced dishes and glass storage containers meant there was little need for handmade plates, jars, and jugs. North Carolina's stills were closed

and there was no longer a demand for hand-turned whiskey jugs. Some potteries closed, but the tradition of pottery making in the Seagrove area continued as potter's skills were passed down within families from generation to generation.

A revival of the industry started in the 1920's when the potters began creating art pottery to sell to visitors in the resort area of Pinehurst, North Carolina, located 30 miles southeast of Seagrove. The tourists had no need for milk crocks and jugs, but they did want vases, pitchers, and other decorative items. Gradually, Seagrove became known for its abundance of pottery with unique decorative styles, including face jugs and slip trailing.

Recognizing the value of the centuries-old pottery tradition in Seagrove, Jacques and Juliana Busbee established Jugtown Pottery in 1917 to help preserve the folk pottery of the area. In 1924, North State Pottery was opened in Sanford, North Carolina. The Cole family and other early potters maintained the tradition by creating old-style salt-glazed stoneware and orange earthenware.

Today, eighth and ninth generation potter families—including the Owens, Coles, Teagues, Lucks, Chriscoes, and Albrights—continue to work and thrive in the Seagrove area. The tens of thousands of visitors who come to Seagrove each year can see, enjoy, and buy pottery from these traditional families as well as from more recent potters who now contribute to the craft. Visitors from around the world are a part of the tradition; the annual trek to Seagrove to purchase pottery for family use and gifts has been a ritual for thousands of families since the early 1900s. Generations of new brides have started their family life with place settings of Seagrove area pottery, as did their mothers and grandmothers before them.

Continuing the Tradition Today

The valuable history of Seagrove pottery was at risk of disappearing until the Museum of North Carolina Traditional Pottery formed in 1983 to preserve the area's living pottery heritage. Headquartered in Seagrove, the Museum is dedicated to preserving and perpetuating the tradition, and educating new generations about the history, and the simple and elegant beauty of traditional pottery.

The Museum carries out its mission through its annual festival and events that give potters an opportunity to display and sell their work, and give visitors a chance to learn about and purchase Seagrove pottery. The Annual Seagrove Pottery Festival, held the weekend before Thanksgiving, is the only time of the year that most of the Seagrove area potters sell their pots at one location. The festival emphasizes hand-made pottery and traditional crafts and offers demonstrations of generations-old techniques. On the last day of the Festival, a limited edition pottery auction is held, with pieces signed and dated for the event by local potters. For 25 years, thousands of pottery lovers and collectors have come from all over the country to attend the Festival. In addition, the Museum holds Winterfest in February, Summerfest in June, Christmas in July, and a December Open House to attract visitors and promote Seagrove area pottery.

As the economy tightens for artists of all kinds, the Museum ensures that “turning and burning” pottery remains a financially viable career by taking a regional lead in the promotion and marketing of the Seagrove pottery community. The festivals bring significant business to the local craftspeople; in fact, the November festival is the major source of income for many potters. In addition, the Museum’s detailed map guides visitors year round to the studios of over 100 potters and seven galleries. The 160,000 full-color maps the organization prints each year are sent to welcome centers all over the United States, to Canada, given out in Seagrove, and mailed to anyone else who requests them. The organization’s website also promotes local potters and the Seagrove area as a whole. While several potteries have had to close because rising gas prices have reduced numbers of visitors and income, many more survive because the Museum displays and promotes their work.

Outreach and education are also integral to the Museum’s mission. Students from other counties visit for demonstrations and history, and some local school students show, demonstrate, and sell their own pottery at the Museum’s festivals. The group’s tent at the state fair attracts thousands of visitors each fall. Museum volunteers have traveled across the state advocating for the Seagrove pottery heritage and staff work closely with travel writers, state and local tourism offices, attractions and area hotels to raise awareness of Seagrove’s importance. As a result, not only is the area known in North Carolina, its reputation has also spread across the United States and to other parts of the world. The Museum has received calls from interested people in Europe and was featured by Voice of America on one of their international television broadcasts.

The Museum’s dedicated board has been vital to its success. In 2004, the Museum hired an office manager who oversees three part-time employees to support numerous members and volunteers who keep the organization going strong. Always, the Museum works to represent the best interests of their community. From the beginning, the Board of Directors has been a true cross-section of the Seagrove area. Along with a strong staff, board, and volunteer corps, the Museum enjoys a growing membership. Museum members are welcome at the annual Seagrove Pottery Festival and other Museum-sponsored activities. The Museum is a 501(c) 3 nonprofit organization.

Membership dues, donations, grants and proceeds from the annual Seagrove Pottery Festival have been the primary income sources for the Museum and its projects. Throughout the years, the festival has funded the printing and distribution of the organization’s map guiding visitors to potteries, and a pictorial pottery shop booklet that features pen and ink drawings of the exteriors of shops.

The Need for a Permanent Home

The Museum of North Carolina Traditional Pottery has successfully preserved and promoted the pottery heritage in the Seagrove area through its festivals, maps, and educational programs for 25 years, yet it has never had a permanent home. Currently, the Museum is housed in a small room in the front of the City Hall. Because the organization shares the building with the town government, the sheriff’s department, and the water department, it is not an obvious destination for visitors interested in pottery. Even so, over the years thousands of curious

pottery shoppers have stopped there to ask for directions, see samples of the types of work potters create and learn about the area. Yet the 148 square-foot area that the Museum now occupies does not serve its needs for programs and displays.

For example, the Museum has little space to store or display fine examples of traditional historical pottery, such as the Randolph plate. The Randolph plate, acquired in 1983 for \$6,200, was the first piece of antique pottery purchased for the museum's permanent collection. This beautifully decorated slipware plate is dated by experts to the late 1700s and is believed to have originated in Randolph County. The unsigned plate's age, quality of design, condition and rarity make it one of the finest and most significant pieces of antique pottery ever to be found in the Seagrove area. It is presently displayed at the Pottery Center as a gift from the Museum. The Museum frequently receives calls from local individuals who want to donate other historical pieces to the Museum, but there is not enough space to support a large collection.

The Museum has worked all along to collaborate with potters and others involved in perpetuating traditional North Carolina pottery. In the late 1990's, the Museum supported the creation of the North Carolina Pottery Center, which highlights potters' work from around the state. Before the Pottery Center was built, the Museum purchased the property, along with the adjacent old white house, and gave it to the Center. The Museum also originally paid wages for Center employees when the Museum was located there.

The Pottery Center provides an important service, but it has a broader focus than the Museum. The Museum of North Carolina Traditional Pottery **focuses specifically on the Seagrove area** as a unique site, with its own local traditions and styles. From its founding, Museum staff members have sought a home where they can promote work from the immediate area, including portions of Randolph, Moore, Montgomery, Chatham, and Lee counties.

With the new Museum—and the pottery galleries, Pottery Center, around 100 individual potters, and annual pottery festivals—the Seagrove area will become an even more desirable destination for visitors from all over the state, the nation, and the world.

A New Home for the Museum of North Carolina Traditional Pottery: Preserving the Tradition for Future Generations

After a quarter century of preserving the history and tradition of local pottery, the Museum of North Carolina Traditional Pottery has at last found a spacious, permanent new home. The group recently purchased the old Seagrove Grocery, a building centrally located on the Pottery Highway that will expand the Museum's size from 148 square feet to 5600 square feet.

The new building will become a vibrant tourist destination, with a large display of ware from Seagrove area potters, displays of historical artifacts from the region, and information about the history of the Seagrove community. The added space will make it possible for the Museum to acquire and exhibit more rare and historic pieces. The Museum will also offer a coffee shop for weary travelers in an area where there are few options for refreshments. As a

tourist information center, it will distribute the organization's popular map and sell souvenirs and other educational material.

The house adjacent to the grocery store will be used to house administrative offices and as space for demonstrations, seminars, meetings, and hosting visiting craftspeople. The house will also provide much needed storage, particularly for pottery donations that must be properly curated for exhibition.

The new building will present opportunities to create even more educational experiences for visitors. The thousands of school children and others who will pass through the Museum's doors each year will have a chance to learn about and enjoy the simple, elegant, and functional beauty of 200 years of traditional pottery through displays and by watching visiting artisans demonstrate their skills. In a time when so many things are made by machines, the Museum wants people to know how potters today use their hands to form vessels of clay just as their families have done for generations.

The new Museum building will fully complement and enhance the organization's other ongoing projects. The centrally located Museum will become a main attraction at the many annual festival, particularly the Seagrove Pottery Festival, one of North Carolina's most popular venues for education, display, and demonstration of historic arts and life ways.

The new Museum will complement rather than compete with the Pottery Center. The Museum, which will not charge an entry fee, will present more detail on the Seagrove area specifically while the Pottery Center provides information on pottery statewide. Every potter will be included on the Museum's map, as they are now, and every potter can choose to have examples of work on display at the new building. The Museum will serve the public and the potters—educating the public and bringing business to the potters that help them survive and continue their craft.

In addition, the new Museum of North Carolina Traditional Pottery will become part of a national celebration. In 2006, our nation celebrates the *Year of the Museum*, recognizing the role of America's museums in transforming society by educating, inspiring, and leading their local communities. The new museum building adds to the network of institutions across the nation that preserves cherished history and traditions.

Finally, the new Museum will bring significant economic benefits to the community. A highway bypass has meant that travelers no longer have to pass through Seagrove. A new Museum will add to the attractions that make those visitors want to take the Seagrove exit and step back in time, to an era of close community and fine craftsmanship. The new visitors and potential pottery buyers that the Museum brings will help local craftsmen survive financially and attract business for the local economy.

The Campaign for a new Museum of North Carolina Traditional Pottery

To bring the longtime dream of a home for the Museum of North Carolina Traditional Pottery to life, the organization's Board of Directors has approved a \$2 million strategic plan for

capital improvements and endowment. Capital funds of \$1,250,000 will convert the Seagrove grocery and house into a beautiful educational museum and program center and another \$750,000 will initiate a much needed endowment.

The initial work has already begun—the building has been emptied of old shelving and other debris. Now, the organization is ready to realize its dream of transforming the old structure into a beautiful piece of architecture and a spectacular new home for the North Carolina Museum of Traditional Pottery. When the structure is ready, the staff and volunteers will begin setting up the exhibit cases, educational plaques, information center, and coffee shop. The adjacent house will be renovated to provide needed space for curating permanent collections and exhibits and a base for visiting artists and pottery making demonstrations. The new Museum anticipates opening its doors in the near future.

The endowment portion of the campaign will support the ongoing operations of the building, including hiring additional staff to manage it. The campaign will also enable the Museum to expand outreach and education efforts, bringing more visiting craftspeople to the area for demonstrations, expanding the annual festival offerings, and providing funds for staff to travel around the state and nation giving presentations about Seagrove life, craft, and traditions.

Conclusion and Benefits

A spectacular new building will move the Museum for Traditional North Carolina Pottery even further forward in its mission to preserve the rich pottery tradition of North Carolina's five-county Seagrove area. Visitors can see the beautiful work from our many generations of potter families, from slip trailed red earthenware plates to face jugs. They can see examples of all the local potter's work and choose their favorites. As they sip a cup of coffee, they can study a map of all the local potteries, planning a route to visit their favorites. And if they hit the date right, they can use the Museum as a starting point to collect information before they join the fun at one of the annual events or festival.

To make the dream of a new Museum for Traditional Pottery a reality, we need your support so we will not lose any more of our pottery heritage. Help us preserve a craft, a way of life, and a community's history for future generations. Support us today as we prepare to transform our new building into a home where the world can see, enjoy, and learn about traditional North Carolina pottery.