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# PHILIP

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## Some artful maneuvering got Phil Herrington involved in the Arkansas Arts Center. Make him part of the permanent collection.

Some people have a champagne-and-caviar perception of the Arkansas Arts Center -- a place of stiff, white collars and stuffy, high-dollar receptions.

Those people should talk to Phil Herrington, who was a child in Arkadelphia the first time he learned about the Arts Center. On a grade-school field trip, he followed his classmates into the Art Center's Artmobile, parked in a lot next to the Arkadelphia Fire Department.

"That," he remembered, "was the first time I walked through a gallery and gawked."

Through gawking comes understanding, if conditions are right. So, as chairman of the Arts Center's board of trustees, Herrington spends a lot of time making sure the center is available to anyone, to "educate, entertain and enjoy -- and maybe, at times, to inspire."

At the Arts Center "we're doing what people talk about in churches and political campaigns and debate in legislatures -- bridging gaps and inspiring people. It goes on here every day. At times, it goes on too quietly."

Herrington is president and CEO of Herrington Inc., a private investment firm of business advisers, with offices in the Stephens Building. "The art's not as good there as it is here," he joked, seated in the Arts Center library before a recent board meeting.

At a conference table, he was surrounded by art books and, on one wall, a window with a view of the downstairs gallery. Until Feb. 19, visitors can see an exhibit titled "Let Us March On! Selected Civil Rights Photos by Ernest Withers."

The show provides an excellent example of the way the center uses art to challenge conventional wisdom and educate about the past, Herrington said. He described one of the photos of about 150 black people marching in protest, carrying signs that read, "I am a man."

He said, "It is interesting to me how we all grew up -- good people, good values, going to church every Sunday, reading the Bible, and saying we believed that God was no respecter of persons -- and it was necessary for an entire movement over years and years to try to convince so many people that a black man is a man notwithstanding the color of his skin. There's something really odd about that."

The visiting exhibit complements a \$20 million permanent collection, including a group of drawings -- considered by many to be among the best in the world -- by artists such as Picasso, van Gogh and Rembrandt. Every year, about 350,000 people look at the collections, take a class in the Museum School, browse the Museum Shop or lunch in the restaurant, The Vineyard in the Park.

But rather than being a snow globe of self-contained activity, Herrington said, the Arts Center is a growing, step-right-up traveling show that can interest people from the Ozarks to the Delta.

In fact, another 150,000 people annually in every Arkansas county contemplate exhibits, view Tell-A-Tale productions and crowd into the Artmobile -- many seeing original works for the first time, just as Herrington did during his childhood.

Even the famed drawings hit the road now and then. "We loan drawings from our permanent collection to every major art institution in this country, and probably 50 major art institutions in the world," Herrington said.

It's important to Herrington to stress the versatility of the Arts Center. He quoted the results of a survey conducted by the Association of Museum Directors, which compares 170 museums based on the way they annually spend their endowment to develop programs and collections.

"This is not a survey of local and regional institutions," he said. Participants include the National Gallery in Washington, D.C., the Los Angeles County Museum and the Metropolitan Museum in New York -- "all the big players."

Results released this summer rank the Arkansas Arts Center as the sixth most effective museum in the country. That, Herrington said, is a well-deserved honor.

The children's theater "has been recognized for 10 years as one of the best in the country." And led by David Bailin, the Museum School offers classes that range "from your 5-year-old daughter receiving instruction in finger painting to professionals offering advanced classes in drawing, painting, pottery."

Under Bailin's direction, the school has become a stand-out among programs that take art to children and to homeless shelters. Whether on the Arts Center campus or in towns around Arkansas, there's never an admission charge for Arts Center activities.

"There is something here that can be significant to virtually anyone who lives in this state," Herrington said.

There are also volunteer opportunities for anyone who has time to give to the center. "People make a mistake in assuming that getting involved at the Arts Center means you have to be an expert about art."

That's a fact he learned from experience.

Herrington became interested in the Arts Center during the early '80s when his oldest daughter, Christina, took a class in the Museum School. A few years later, Sandy Besser was elected board president and asked Herrington to support the center with a corporate membership through Arthur Young & Co., where Herrington was a partner and later became partner-in-charge of the Arkansas audit practice. Within a year, Besser also asked him to join the board. Herrington said he wouldn't name himself the worst member of that era, "but I would rank in everyone's Top 5.

"I had an interest, but I was intimidated by my lack of knowledge. I made the assumption that everyone on the board knew more than I did. I wasn't a player."

Herrington let himself fade into the background as a board member while he got his company off the ground. While traveling and establishing a clientele for Herrington Inc., he eventually rotated off the Arts Center board for a couple of years.

He was stunned, he said, when he was asked to rejoin the board as treasurer of the executive committee. This time, based on a "long-established affection for purpose," he decided he was going to throw his energy into the board.

"If I asked stupid questions and offered stupid suggestions," Herrington said, "that was far better than sitting on the board and being a nonentity."

He added that patrons laid a foundation for the Arts Center in the late '50s and early '60s, with the leadership of Jeannette Edris Rockefeller and the late Gov. Winthrop Rockefeller. "What they did 35 years ago, we lived off of 'til recently. It's up to us to leave it as it is or take it to a new level," Herrington said.

As they began to look at how they could improve the Arts Center, board members enlisted the help of Townsend Wolfe, director and chief curator. Herrington credits Wolfe with being "the single person who's had the greatest long-term effect" on the center, with his combination of art and business savvy.

Trustees are expected to invest time as well as money in the center, Herrington said. Attendance has doubled to about 90 percent at monthly meetings held all over the center to acquaint the board with the staff and the building.

"We evaluated every aspect of the program, from top to bottom." Now, he said, "It's important to stand up and do what community leaders did 35 years ago."

So to strengthen the center's endowment, board members are soliciting support locally in a \$12 million capital campaign, which will officially begin this summer.

"I think people who know the institution the best are willing to support it. That speaks volumes to everyone else -- agencies, foundations, individuals out of state," he said. "It will also say something about the business leadership in Arkansas. Lots of people assume the business community in this city is out to perpetuate itself and nothing else."

But Herrington said he found strong examples of community-minded leaders in friends and clients including Ruth Rummel, chairman and principal stockholder of Rebsamen Insurance Co., and James "Bum" Atkins, director of Marsh & McLennan and president of Marsh & McLennan of Arkansas.

And, for example, in board meetings of Fifty for the Future -- a group of business people who work to improve economic and educational opportunities in Central Arkansas -- "We devote a lot of time to discussing reinvestment in the community, responsible government, participation by our companies in community affairs."

Herrington developed an interest in business and politics growing up in Arkadelphia. His first experience with a political campaign came in 1968 when Sen. David Pryor of Camden ran for U.S. Representative from District 4. Herrington said his parents told him, "If somebody like that is going to run for public office, he ought to be supported."

So he and his brother, Steve, sent Pryor a letter and enclosed \$3 they made mowing yards. Pryor turned that contribution into the theme for a commercial to emphasize the importance of grass-roots involvement in successful campaigning.

"I put them in a commercial and ran it on Channel 10 in El Dorado," said Pryor in a telephone interview from his Washington, D.C., office. "I told them I made them famous."

Herrington has twice served on Pryor's campaign finance committee and was Mark Herrington's campaign treasurer in the younger Pryor's unsuccessful bid for the Democratic nomination for attorney general in May. Herrington is "truly one of the remarkable young men of Arkansas," said the elder Pryor. "We have this tremendous affection for him. The Pryors are not very well organized, and he's helped to organize us."

He added that Herrington also has vision. "You put those two together, and you have a very powerful force. And I think that describes our friend Phil Herrington."

Pryor said that, when working with others, Herrington "is one who does not have big elbows, elbows that try to elbow other people out of the picture. When he says something, people listen. For his age, he has a tremendous amount of wisdom, and I think that comes through readily when people meet him."

Herrington is an honor graduate of Harding College in Searcy, where he met Annette Cone. On their third date he asked her to marry him, then asked her father, James Cone, for permission to plan the nuptials.

"He started laughing, and said, 'You're quite a kidder' and went to bed," Herrington said. But after a year, Cone relented. The Herringtons were married in May 1974 and moved to Dallas --he went to work for Arthur Andersen and Co., and she worked for the Alexander Grant and Co. accounting firm.

The couple returned to Little Rock when Herrington was hired by Russell Brown and Co., now Arthur Young Co. There Herrington got to know Bum Atkins and became his accountant.

"I was quite impressed with him, primarily because he got me a tremendous tax refund the first year," Atkins joked. "We became instant friends after that."

Atkins remains a Herrington client. He said Herrington has "an entrepreneurial attitude, which is very unusual for most accountants. ... He is, first of all, very smart. He's unlike some accountants who tend to be bean counters; he has an instant nose for the big picture. He's very quick to pick up trends in business."

That entrepreneurial instinct was evident when Herrington worked at Arthur Young with clients who own their companies. He said he noticed they were having a lot of fun and decided he wanted to build a company that would take clients' ideas and make them a business reality.

In 1986, he opened Herrington Inc. in the Worthen Bank Building, then moved to the Stephens Building in 1993.

Today his firm manages \$250 million in assets, helping strong companies grow and sometimes spurring growth in weak companies. With a Little Rock staff of six, he manages ventures including resort developments in Hilton Head, S.C., and the Florida Panhandle.

"It's fun to work with good people and make things happen. I'm not sure how many people get the chance to do that," he said. "I know every day how lucky I am to get to do what I'm doing."

His interest in volunteering extends to membership on the Arkansas Community Foundation board and the governmental affairs council of the Little Rock Chamber of Commerce, as well as the board of Central Arkansas Christian School, where Christina and the Herringtons' second daughter, Caroline, attend. The Herringtons are members of Pleasant Valley Church of Christ.

Through his involvement with the Arts Center, Herrington has developed an interest in abstract drawings and Impressionist paintings. "Townsend (Wolfe) tells me my taste is at least not awful, and I take some consolation in that."

He said he's no connoisseur. And participation at the Arts Center doesn't require him -- or anyone else -- to be one.

"If I can make any contribution out here at all, anybody on the face of the earth can. I had no background, no training at all."

But, he said, he had the one thing it takes to experience all the Arts Center has to offer. "I had an interest."

Philip Lawrence Herrington

DATE AND PLACE OF BIRTH -- Oct. 2, 1952, Camden.

LAST BOOK READ -- "No Ordinary Time" by Doris Kearns Goodwin.

FAVORITE STYLES OF ART -- Impressionist paintings, abstract drawings. I'M A SUCKER FOR -- A sad story.

ONE THING THAT DRIVES ME UP THE WALL -- Conventional wisdom.

MY GOLF HANDICAP IS -- 12.

FAVORITE VACATION SPOT -- Southern France. Scotland is a close second. BEST BUSINESS DECISION I EVER MADE -- To start my own company.

I WISH I KNEW MORE ABOUT -- Art.

MY WIFE WISHES I WOULD -- Be more disciplined. She thinks I say yes to too many requests and am overcommitted.

FAVORITE MOVIES -- "Dead Poets Society" and "Driving Miss Daisy."

MY FRIENDS LIKE ME BECAUSE -- I'm fun to be around.

FAVORITE RECENT EXHIBIT AT THE ARTS CENTER -- The Ernest Withers exhibition currently on display.

ONE WORD TO SUM ME UP -- Involved.

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