

In Memoriam – Loretta Webster

By John L. Breuninger, President
Woodland Indian Art, Inc.

On August 1, 2023, Loretta Webster, Esq. and Native American Artist who founded the Annual Woodland Indian Art Show & Market (WIASM) and subsequently the Woodland Indian Art, Inc. (WIA), made her journey to the spirit world.

Mrs. Webster received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Ripon College in 1959 and stated that her “professional career concentrated in the area of administration of tribal programs and administrative procedure.” She further stated, “throughout my career, I was on numerous boards, committees and commissions that planned and organized urban Indian organizations and tribal programs that grew to meet the social needs of American Indian people.” She further stated that “volunteerism is an important value in my life.”

In 1988, Loretta earned a Juris Doctorate from the University of Wisconsin Law School, was licensed and was employed as the Oneida Tribe’s Land Management Attorney until her retirement in 2003.

Retirement did not last long, in 2004 Loretta and her husband Stan purchased the Bear Paw Keepsakes business and renamed it the Bear Paw Art Gallery. In 2006, Loretta and Stan with the assistance of a few volunteer Oneida artists organized the first Woodland Indian Art Show and Market.

Loretta credits her older sister Nori Damrow as the first person to teach her how to do beadwork in the early 1960s. In addition, “Sam Thomas, Cayuga, and his mother Lorna Hill have been the most influential teachers to me in the past 30 years, they live in Niagara Falls, Canada.” “They gave me the motivation to concentrate on Iroquois Raised Beadwork. Another influential person was Rosemary Rickard Hill, a Tuscarora Raised Beadwork Artist. “I attended her two-week raised beadwork classes and learned several new techniques and stitches during these intensive sessions.”

Mrs. Webster has been beading for over 60 years and for the past 20 years, she has concentrated on Iroquois Raised Beadwork. Her artistic talents and beadwork have been shown, displayed and sold in multiple locations throughout the country. Her accomplishments, successes and awards are too numerous to count.

Throughout her remarkable professional and most successful artistic career, and for the past sixteen (16) years, Mrs. Webster has been at the helm of the Annual Woodland Indian Art Show and Market. Since its inception in 2004, inside the Bear Paw Art Gallery, Loretta, Stan and a few Oneida artists developed the WIASM. Furthermore, they established by-laws and an all Native voluntary Board of Directors (BOD), became incorporated as the Woodland Indian Art, Inc, a non-profit corporation, applied for and received 501c3 status from the IRS.

Mrs. Loretta Webster resigned from the Board of Directors of WIA, Inc in December of 2022 and at the first meeting of the BOD in January 2023, Mrs. Webster was unanimously recommended and approved as an *ex officio* member of the Board.

It was Loretta's dream that Woodland Indian art and culture be recognized and identified throughout the world as a specific genre, just as the Southwestern style is to that region. It is the intent of the WIA's Board of Directors to carry on Loretta's legacy.

In conclusion of this article, I quote Loretta's words to the current Board of Directors:

“And this all started because of my love of raised beadwork, and the fact that my husband and I collect all kinds of Woodland Indian Art.”

Thank You Loretta for all you have done John L. Breuninger, President, WIA, Inc.