

**From the Executive Director**  
***Owning TDS: An Invitation***

We are up and running (finally!) in the new studio. As most of you know, the renovation took more of everything—time, money, patience with the permit processes—than anticipated. The upside has been the outpouring of help in the form of money, labor, materials, advice and skills from so many to build our new space as a true *Center*—a place where energy builds and concentrates, then radiates outward into the larger public.

From the beginning, TDS has emphasized its identity as a *cooperative* for studio art practice and community. Even though I have been smack in the middle of this flood of generosity, I cannot adequately describe the depth of ownership around me, and the honor I feel in having the job as your Director.

The building itself is a physical manifestation that allows us to be together in new ways that we have long envisioned, a place to practice together, to invent and experiment. I've already noticed some signs:

- Students come early for class and hang out on the bench in the gallery, talking together and taking in the show.
- Teachers and volunteers are simultaneously decorating and using the new staff workspace for all sorts of projects, accompanied by coffee and conversation.
- We are collaborating with other organizations to create exhibitions (Arizona Print Group, Contemporary Artists of Southern Arizona) and host events (POG/Chax Press poetry reading series).
- Newsletter sign-up sheets in the gallery are filling up faster than ever, our makeshift rolling bulletin board is also filling up quickly, and more books, slides, and cds are suddenly appearing in the library.
- Roles are becoming more fluid: teachers are enrolling as students in each other's classes; students are becoming art tutors; the teaching drawing certification seminar is overflowing.
- Our roots are showing—our roots as a volunteer-driven organization, that is—in the many people who have come forward to volunteer and in the many new roles and opportunities open to volunteers.

**Where do you fit in?**

As we turn our attention back to our expanding studio art activity, the need for our volunteers does not diminish. I am sometimes asked whether, as we grow and add paid staff, volunteers will become obsolete. Paradoxical as it may seem, the need, and the opportunity, for volunteers grows exponentially.

A small group has just begun to design a more user-friendly volunteer program, and we are looking for some leaders to step up and help us shape this effort. There are many additional jobs and roles spanning every aspect of TDS's operation: gallery greeters, telephone and office assistance, exhibition planning and execution, library management, photography/videography, studio and kitchen management, and newsletter distribution, to name but a few. If you have another idea of something you would be interested in doing, give a call and we might invent something on the spot!

TDS conducted a small research study on participation a few years ago, with some funding from the Arizona Commission on the Arts. What we found is that people who were motivated by either

a connection to our mission or a desire for fellowship, rather than simply improvement of their personal art practice, tended to take on more roles at TDS (for example, as student, docent, donor, Board member). In turn, the more roles people assumed, the richer they felt their TDS experience was.

Most experienced volunteers, at TDS and elsewhere, subscribe to the idea that service is a privilege. Time and time again, volunteers remark upon how much more they have received than given through volunteer service. I invite all of you reading this to consider how you might volunteer at TDS. TDS will succeed only insofar as you, its participants, “own” the studio. Volunteering is the heart of this ownership.

*--Lynn Fleischman*