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End of April means it's 'Clay' time

By: Paul Apfel News Messenger Correspondent

April and May are Feats of Clay months in Lincoln. Now entering its 24th year, this celebration blends history and art in an exhibition of ceramic achievement.

"I've always thought of Feats of Clay as this wonderfully unique blend of history and pop culture," said Mayor Paul Joiner. "Just stepping into the buildings of Gladding, McBean transports you back to the 19th century. The sights, the sounds, the smells all carry back to the days when everything was done by hand. The days of the artisan. All about you are examples of the work of generations. Statues and fountains, gargoyles and cornices, columns and medallions from every corner of our nation."

Lincoln Arts and Culture Foundation's first president, Lynn Estabrook, provided perspective by noting, "Prior to the advent of Feats of Clay, most Lincoln townspeople had no idea what GMcB did, in spite of the fact that many fathers, grandfathers, uncles worked there."

The factory, which opened in 1875 to manufacture clay sewer pipe, expanded a few years later into producing architectural terra cotta and has been in continuous operation ever since. It is one of the oldest continuing operational manufacturing plants on the West Coast.

"The first reception for Feats of Clay in 1987 brought out hundreds of Lincolmites who gaped in amazement at the wondrous art of the plant and the staggering size of the place and its kilns," Estabrook added. "It was also the beginning of a new sense of respect and admiration for the GMcB workers, each of whom were now 'artists.'"

One such artist, although of a more recent era, is Lincoln resident Jean Cross. "Working there has been the highlight of my artistic life," she said. One of Cross' sculptures, an Artemis statue produced for the Nueces County courthouse in Corpus Christi, Texas remains in the factory showroom. Cross made one model from which the factory produced three copies. Two copies went to the courthouse and a third, damaged in firing, is displayed during the Feats of Clay factory tours.

The art show is open to ceramic artists throughout the United States, Canada and Mexico, with most entries coming from the United States. "This is a fantastic opportunity for area artists to compete in an international show," Lincoln ceramist Mike Daley said. "Even if they are not selected as a finalist, the thrill of having your work considered and judged is wonderful. And, if you are selected, such as my colleague Linda Moon was a few years ago, the experience is exceptional."

Artists also have an opportunity to display their works in the Lincoln Arts gift shop. Feats of Clay features an opening reception in the Gladding, McBean factory on April 30 where attendees will be among the

first to view art entries selected by this year's juror, Donna Billick. The ceramist co-founded the Art/Science Fusion Program at the University of California at Davis.

Lincoln Arts docent-led factory tours, offered for \$12 per person, begin May 4 and run through May 30. These tours attract local and out-of-town visitors. Awful Annie's restaurant owner Jay Baker notes that "May is our busiest month of the year" and estimates that sales increase by approximately 25 percent weekdays and 30 to 40 percent weekends. The 1 ½-hour factory tours typically run from 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., depending on the number of tourists booked that day. According to Lincoln Arts Board of Directors President June Reeves, "Nowhere else in the country is there such a juried ceramic art show in a 136-year-old pottery."

Visit [Gladding, McBean](#) online.