

# A Carolina Arts Special Feature

## The 2014 Clay Olympics Took Place at Odyssey Center for Ceramic Arts in Asheville, NC

The North Carolina Clay Club held its second annual Clay Olympics at the Odyssey Center for Ceramic Arts in Asheville, NC, on Wednesday, Jan. 8, 2014. (They meet the second Wednesday of the month from 6 -8:30pm.) The purpose of the event was simply to gather and decompress with local potters for some fun and good-natured competition after a busy holiday season.

"This is the second year in a row that Mellie Mae Lonnemann and I (John Britt) organized the event and Odyssey Center hosted it, providing wheels, full use of their fantastic studio and refreshments for everyone. In addition, Highwater Clay provided 300 pounds of Raku clay for the event."

- The competition included 6 events:
- 1) Largest cylinder (10 pounds of clay in 10 minutes)
  - 2) Fastest thrower (1 pound balls of clay in 8 minutes)
  - 3) Blindfolded throwing (largest cylinder with 3 pounds in 10 minutes)
  - 4) Team throwing (largest cylinder with 3 pounds with two people, only one hand from each person in 10 minutes)
  - 5) Largest handbuilt coil pot (10 pound of clay in 10 minutes)
  - 6) Ugliest face jug (premade jugs blanks in 8 minutes)

Anyone could participate in the events

and sign-ups started in mid-December. The number of participants ranged from 12 to 20, with the most popular being the Face Jug completion.

The face jug competition was organized by Rob Withrow, from Brasstown, NC, near the J.C. Cambell Folk School. He and John Britt made the jug blanks ahead of time so everyone had a blank canvas to start with. Competitors get clay and, sometimes, cracked porcelain cups to insert as "teeth." Withrow is used to hosting face jug events as a part of his business which usually involves making face mugs with groups of people which he then fires and delivers several weeks later. It is a purely fun competition which is judged by the crowd for the "ugliest."

Clay Olympics started out as a completely non-prize event last year but, at the last minute, Dr. Tish Ballance and Melissa, who run a thriving dental office in Waynesville, NC, and other members of the Clay Club, generously donated funds so the club could offer \$50 for each first place, which was a great surprise for all the potters.

This year Dr. Tish Ballance and Melissa upped the ante, giving \$100 gift certificates at Highwater Clay for first place. This spurred other members to raise additional prize money for 2nd and 3rd places by post-

ing a request on the (Ncclayclub.blogspot.com). An additional \$450 was raised from local potters and pottery schools, such as Haywood Community College and ArtsCentered in Bakersville, NC. Twenty other donors also contributed from as far away as Washington, DC.

One of the most entertaining events was the team throwing competition, which required great communication between the parties throwing - one slip-up and the cylinder would be ruined - so potters had to be both patient and controlled. It came as no surprise that the winners of this year's event were Steve and Becky Lloyd, who have been married 25 years.

Newcomer, JD Carter, from Morganton, NC, won the fastest thrower with 27 bowls in 8 minutes. He was also the youngest winner and gives us hope that young potters will continue to sign up and that the competition will be even fiercer in years to come.

Another event of note was the largest thrown vessel, which was won by Gabriel Kline, director of the Odyssey School. Coming in a close second was Joey Sheehan, who joined the competition four minutes late and yet almost over took Kline.

The event was so successful that next year Clay Club hopes to add another event: Conceptual Exhibition. This event will involve having a conceptual art exhibit in a virtual gallery in the contestants mind and then they will take 90 seconds to describe this exhibition. The best description will win.

For anyone interested, videos of the events are posted on the Clay Club Blog at (Ncclayclub.blogspot.com).

List of Winners include:

Biggest thrown vessel:

1. Gabe Kline
2. Matt Kelleher
3. Joey Sheehan

Fastest thrower

1. JD Carter
2. Matt Kelleher
3. Mellie Mae Lonnemann

Blindfolded throwing:

1. Joey Sheehan
2. Chris Jones
3. Travis Fox

Team throwing - see a video of this event at this link (<http://ncclayclub.blogspot.com/2014/01/clay-olympics-2014-team-throwing.html>)

1. Steve and Becky Lloyd
2. Joey Sheehan and Mandy McKee
3. Travis and Cristal Fox

Largest coil pot:

1. Steve Lloyd
2. Mellie Mae Lonnemann
3. Matt Kelleher

Best Face Jug:

1. Cristal Fox
2. Rob Withrow
3. Lee Wolfe
4. Honorable Mention: Nelle Pingree (nose hair is nasty)

Photo commentary by Tom Starland  
All photos are by photographer and ceramic artist Rebecca Ayres of Asheville, NC.



From Wide to Tall



Tall or Double Tall



Tall or Coil



Blind - Now Where is the Center



Blind - Go with the Force



Blind - Seeing through your Hands