

**TO: Workforce Investment Board  
Executive Committee**

**DATE: 11/4/02**

**FROM: WIB Staff**

- For Action
- For Information
- Meeting Notes

**SUBJECT: Bill Strickland and the Manchester Craftsmen's Guild and Bidwell Training Center, Inc.**

**PROPOSED MOTION(S): For information and discussion**

**DISCUSSION: Bill Strickland recently spoke at the 2002 Workforce Policy and Leadership Conference held at the Monterey Marriott and Conference Center September 11-13. Mr. Strickland is the President and CEO of Manchester Craftsmen's Guild and Bidwell Training Center, Inc., both founded in 1968 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. These organizations prepare people for their futures through creative inquiry and production reflection through mentored relationships with artisits, educators and counselors. The Manchester Craftsmen's Guild and Bidwell Training Center operates out of a \$9 million, 62,000-square-foot building. Both organizations serve a culturally diverse population with numerous vocational and arts and crafts training programs. Bill Strickland's philosophy is that blue collar workers can benefit from an education in the arts and crafts by building up their self-esteem.**

**Mr. Strickland was born in Pittsburgh in 1947. He graduated from David B. Oliver High School in 1965. In 1969, he earned a bachelor's degree in American History and Foreign Relations from the University of Pittsburgh. he has held numerous national positions such as Chairman of the Expansion Arts Panel of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in Washington, D.C. and Council Member on the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. He, his wife Rose and daughters Julie and Olivia, reside on Pittsburgh's North Side.**

**ATTACHMENT(S): None**

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## Community Arts Network

Reading Room

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### **Art in Context: Industrial Pittsburgh catching up with Bill Strickland**

by **Gil Ott**

(This story appeared in High Performance #67, Fall 1994.)

"We're in the development business, not just the arts business."  
-*Bill Strickland*

To hear Bill Strickland tell it, the most recent leap in the evolution of arts organizing already occurred, in Pittsburgh, in 1972. These days, many artists and organizations are evolving from arts-centered alternatives toward a community orientation and social activism, all the while struggling with the ideological implications of multiculturalism and class equity. According to Strickland, this synthesis was born spontaneously, fully armed and aware, when Manchester Craftsmen's Guild and Bidwell Training Center came together under his direction more than two decades ago. But then, Bill's given to hyperbole, and to making it all sound heroic and indisputable in retrospect. Give it to him. One look at where he's taken Manchester and Bidwell will show how much we still can learn from him.



**Bill Strickland, photo by Lonnie Graham**

There can be little doubt that what happened in 1972 has had far-reaching implications for the arts today. At that time, Manchester Craftsmen's Guild, an arts program for kids in the city's North Side, was four years old, as was Bidwell Training Center, an antipoverty program established by the Presbyterian Church to provide vocational training to minority students and single mothers. Strickland, himself a dedicated ceramist who credits his arts training with providing the discipline necessary to rise above poverty, had founded Manchester, and when Bidwell's board asked him to take over their program as well, he immediately saw the power in the overlap:

"What is wrong with steel workers, welfare mothers, black kids is spiritual," claims Strickland. "Craftsmanship sets a style, and idea, an attitude. There is a direct correlation between the arts and self-esteem. What we are doing is

trying to change these people's sense of reality."

With this goal in sight, Manchester and Bidwell now thrive together. The two organizations remain fiscally separate, though they are located in the same building and they share several board members and Strickland as Executive Director. This natural association of vocational training and arts programs has yielded success for both organizations. Bidwell now offers programs in information sciences, culinary arts, pharmacy, medical transcription, chemical lab tech and medical claims processing. Bidwell Food Services operates a 200-seat restaurant, and a catering service that counts Pittsburgh's International Airport among its clients and generates profits for the home base. Manchester Craftsmen's Guild enrolls 300 students each year, developing an arts curriculum even as school-based arts programs are defunded. Students learn photography, ceramics and music, and participate in the production of public performances in the Guild's 350-seat auditorium. The Guild's jazz series features major names like Ahmad Jamal, Dizzy Gillespie and Stanley Turrentine, and is cosponsored by the mainstream Pittsburgh Cultural Trust as well as the NEA and Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund jazz programs. And even as Pittsburgh's visual artists complain about the dearth of noncommercial venues for exhibition, Manchester is exporting exhibits to a downtown satellite gallery and area colleges and universities.

Clearly, Manchester/Bidwell is not "marginal": when asked to name his collaborators, Strickland mentions the Howard Heinz Endowment and Mellon Bank, two of the largest funders in Pittsburgh, let alone the entire U.S. While major funders are not what normally come to mind as collaborators, their investment in this community arts and job training center has paid off.

Manchester Craftsmen's Guild is hardly a typical community arts organization. It operates out of a \$9 million, 62,000-square-foot building designed by Tasso Katselas as the prototype for the city's new airport. Its location is industrial. Strickland readily admits that Manchester and Bidwell have had no more contact with the poor, black neighborhood across the highway than they have with any other neighborhood in the city. The familiar model of community organizing, in which power is built from a local base and then extended, does not apply here. As with his contacts with Heinz and Mellon, Strickland went directly to the Pittsburgh school district and IBM to create Manchester/Bidwell's arts education and information processing programs. "I believe that if you want to talk to somebody, you go and talk to them," Strickland says. Leadership and clear articulation of vision supplant consensus.

Looking at results, however, it is clear this vision has contributed to Manchester/Bidwell's ability to meet community needs on several levels. Manchester's fundamental program is educational, drawing a culturally diverse student body from that of Pittsburgh's economically disadvantaged public high schools. Students "self select" from throughout the city's high schools. Tuition, for them, is free, while the public school system's contract figures at 28% of the Craftsmen's Guild's annual \$800,000 budget. Bidwell's clients are adults of all ages, though they, too, demonstrate an impressive cultural variety, in part due to a municipal unemployment profile resulting from a downturn in the steel industry, which has ignored ethnic and even class background. Enrollment is competitive, with students needing to demonstrate a true desire to participate, and only one in five accepted.

Although it provides

valuable skills in problem solving and creative thinking, Manchester's arts training program overlays a broader philosophy. Attitude and presentation are important concepts, regarded as life skills at Manchester and Bidwell, and they are intended to prepare students for participation in the mainstream, the competitive worlds of the academy and business. While many contemporary artists have joined in modern ethnography's critique of the bifurcation of language and personal style inherent in cultural assimilation, Manchester faces the issue directly, focusing on the practical needs of freeing young people from poverty.



**Student with teacher in the Apprenticeshop Training Program of Manchester Craftsmen's Guild. Photo by Lonnie Graham.**

"We have no problem with graffiti, with drugs or crime [at Manchester Craftsmen's Guild]. That's because the message here is one of hope. That's what the arts are about. Hope." The language he shares with funders, policy makers, social engineers and progressive artists is one of utility. The arts are the most accessible, cost effective means of instilling creative thinking. Combine them with vocational training, and the student brings enthusiasm, curiosity and meaning to the task. This blend of arts education and job training has its natural extension in profitable economic development projects.

Part of the beauty of the Manchester/Bidwell model is its seamlessness. Each area is linked with the others, as it is with communities of endeavor throughout Pittsburgh. The links are visible everywhere. Art classes are not a requirement for those enrolled at Bidwell Training Center, but some students do take them, and the correspondence of the two programs is inescapable. Manchester's arts program consists of ceramics and photography, both forms with ready technical and market applications. High-quality works of art, made by students and by visiting masters, is everywhere in the building, inscribing the ideal that striving and excellence, added to appropriate training, equal success. Chef Bob Lawless, who teaches in Bidwell's culinary arts program, offers a profile of his students, and of the value of an arts perspective in his work. "Many students come from other careers. They've left them due to layoffs or life crises, and need to begin again. They often have preconceived ideas of the food service industry, thinking it's like McDonalds, or being a prep cook in a hospital cafeteria. Much of food preparation is humdrum, but in any kitchen setting there are opportunities to express creativity. You've got to let people use their imagination, so they don't get bored. Not many cooking schools today encourage this. The whole atmosphere at Bidwell challenges the students to try something different, and for many who have learned to suppress this side of themselves, this is very difficult. I call it a discovery-based program. How do you interpret a chicken, in contemporary terms?"

Still, Bidwell is essentially an economic development project. Its reputation for well trained and disciplined workers has made it a prime recruiting link for the industries it serves. The culinary arts program has spun off Bidwell Food Services, a for-profit business which is 77% owned by the Training Center, and which manages an in-house restaurant as well as food services for Pittsburgh's International Airport and other area institutions. BIDCO, an incubator for businesses owned by women and minorities, provides office space and support services out of a renovated old mill in a neighborhood similar to Manchester. Future plans include the development of 18 acres near the Manchester/Bidwell site as an industrial park, and the exportation of the Bidwell concept to other cities around the U.S.

Bill thinks big. It's his moment to do so. Certainly, Manchester Craftsmen's Guild and Bidwell Training Center, and all the satellite programs they've engendered, did not appear overnight. Despite their funding fortunes, they've struggled into being, and continue, as they grow, to face the same challenges as any arts or community development effort. But they are beginning to be noticed. Strickland now travels around the country talking about his unique vision for the arts and urban development. Following a visit to the site in 1992, President Bush appointed him to the National Council on the Arts, the NEA's governing body.

More recently Bill Strickland has been acting as a consultant to the Ford Foundation in helping develop a national funding program for community development and the arts. Through this program, eight Community Development Corporations from around the U.S. will be selected to participate in a planning process leading to the adoption of cultural programs. Possibilities include the creation of new programs sponsored by the CDCs themselves, collaboration with existing arts or cultural organizations, or the development of new cultural facilities. But why build the program on CDCs, when so many good arts organizations are already located in community settings? "CDCs are Ford's thing," Strickland replies. "But for communities to be healthy, they have to have cultural organizations. You need the arts to build community."

Few artists would argue with this, and perhaps the combined pragmatism and optimism of Bill Strickland's approach is necessary seasoning for those working in communities. The effectiveness of community-based artmaking depends, at least in part, on its success in advancing a range of community agendas. Manchester Craftsmen's Guild demonstrates that this function can be as basic as instilling notions of quality, or, in other words, the foundation of critical aesthetics and artistic rigor.

However, these goals are never the goals of the arts alone. Successful collaboration depends upon a program's ability to help meet the needs of all collaborators. This requires clear delineation of roles and expectations, long-term commitment to and understanding of the community, and trust. Community development corporations, schools, social service agencies—all of the organizations that operate within and for communities—will naturally defend their own practices against the scarcity experienced by all. Some are openly hostile toward arts programs, seeing them as frivolous, agents of gentrification or competitors for resources. Often arts programs are pigeonholed, and the only options offered are after-school programs or murals. Nothing wrong with these, of course, but the imagination suggests so many more expansive options. And that's the province of the artist.

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**Gil Ott** works at the Painted Bride Art Center in Philadelphia, where he coordinates the Philadelphia-area Coalition for Community Development and the Arts, an alliance of more than 120 neighborhood-based and city-wide organizations exploring comprehensive approaches to community revitalization.

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The Community Arts Network is a partnership project of [Art in the Public Interest](#) and The Virginia Tech Department of Theatre Arts' Consortium for the Study of Theatre and Community. The CAN project promotes information exchange, research and critical dialogue within the field of community-based arts.

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