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THE ARTS

Retiree sponsors prize for artists

By [Jay Handelman](#)

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Bob Greenfield may have more than his share of sleepless nights, but he puts his mind to good use.

Earlier this year, the retired attorney started wondering how he could best support artists and their creativity.

"In centuries past, artists found sponsors who supported them and enabled them to create and produce works of art," he said. "We have lots of people who care about the arts, but they give money to organizations and it gets lost. I started to think: Wouldn't it be wonderful if there was a way to have someone support an artist in contemporary conditions?"

From his late-night musings came the Greenfield Prize, a \$30,000 grant to an individual artist from a wide range of disciplines who will be commissioned to create a new piece of work within two years and take part in a six-week residency at the Hermitage Artist Retreat on Manasota Key.

"The overall goal of the prize is to stimulate a great work of art that will be created here," said Bruce Rodgers, executive director of the Hermitage. "That's what Bob and Louise hope to do, to take someone's vision of what they want to do and provide the means for them to see it through." (Louise is Greenfield's wife.)



STAFF PHOTO / ED PFUELLER Bruce Rodgers, left, executive director of the Hermitage Artist Retreat with Bob Greenfield, who is funding a \$30,000 prize to a visiting artist at the artists retreat. The prize will commission original works of art in a variety of mediums and include a six-week residency at the Hermitage on Manasota Key.

The prize differs from many others that honor artists for work already completed.

The Greenfield Prize will provide one grant a year, though the type of work created will differ each year.

"The discipline will change every year, or it could be based on a theme or an idea," Rodgers said, noting that commissions could go to writers, visual artists, choreographers, directors or other types of artists. "We're open to doing anything. There are unlimited possibilities with this."

For the first year, three playwrights will be requested to submit proposals for a new play that will have its debut in the spring of 2010 in a performance at the Asolo Repertory Theatre. Three composers will be invited to submit ideas for a chamber piece that will be performed by the Sarasota Orchestra in the spring of 2011.

A panel of experts in each discipline, to be revealed after the winner is announced at a banquet each spring, will select the nominees and the eventual winners. The two other candidates each year will be offered residencies at the Hermitage, which Rodgers expects to grow in prominence from this new prize. Each selected artist will have two years to complete the work.

"This prize really helps to set a direction for us, to establish our ability to commission work at a national level and allow us to pursue other work for commissioning in the future. It's great for the Hermitage, great for Sarasota and puts us on another plane on the regional and national picture."

The Hermitage is a beachfront collection of historic cottages, dating back to the early 20th century. Each of them has recently undergone extensive renovations.

More than 40 artists have spent up to several weeks at the Hermitage working on new books, plays, paintings, sculpture or music since it opened in 2003, including sculptor Malcolm Robertson, actress Blair Brown, playwrights Romulus Linney and Danny Hoch and composers Daniel Bernard Roumain and Gweneth Walker.

The fellows invited to the Hermitage take part in at least a couple of community activities during their residencies. Earlier this year, Linney had a reading of a new play done at the Venice Theatre and participated in a discussion at Florida Studio Theatre.

For the new Greenfield Prize, the Hermitage will work with a producing partner arts organization to perform or exhibit the new piece.

The Greenfield Foundation gift amounts to about \$126,000 a year every year in

perpetuity to cover the costs of the selection process, residencies and the commission gift, Rodgers said. "This is an extraordinary commitment."

The Greenfields have long supported such Sarasota arts groups as the Asolo Repertory Theatre, Florida Studio Theatre and the Banyan, among others. Among other social and civic programs, the Greenfield Foundation also funds the prestigious Goldsmith Awards Program for investigative journalism at the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard University. The new award is modeled after the Goldsmith Prize.

Greenfield said he has focused his arts giving in the past on what he called "cutting edge theater. We gave money to FST for a cutting edge play, not for musicals, and though I happen to like musicals, I wanted to support something that might not otherwise get seen," he said.

Rodgers said he expects artists to be excited about the prize.

"We can say to them, 'I'm going to give you \$30,000 to create a new piece of art and all you have to do is come to Florida for six weeks on the beach in a great location.' I don't think they'll mind."

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