

Two Santa Feans receive MacArthur Fellowships

By CRAIG SMITH
The New Mexican

When the MacArthur Foundation called, Tom Joyce couldn't believe his ears.

"I thought at first: How can this be?" the Santa Fe blacksmith said. "I said, 'Are you sure you're speaking to the right person? You're speaking to a blacksmith!'"

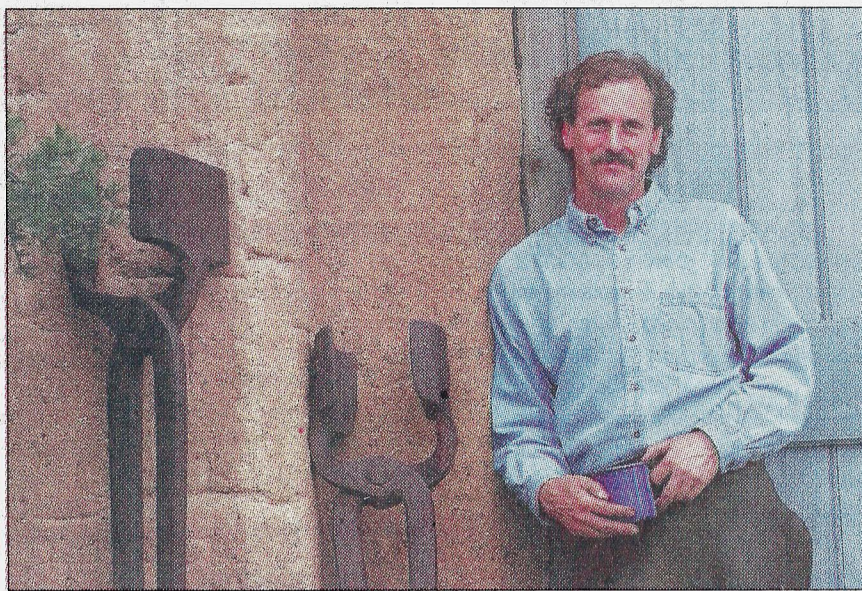
But Daniel J. Socolow, director of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's Fellows Program, had the right number. The 46-year-old Joyce is one of 24 recipients of 2003 Fellow-

ships, colloquially known as "genius awards." Santa Fe ceramicist Daisy Youngblood, 58, is another. Each will receive \$500,000 in no-strings-attached support over the next five years.

"Nothing is unusual in the MacArthur Fellows program, because we have no usual guidelines," Socolow said when asked if it's common for a city to have two MacArthur Fellows named at once. "We're looking at people, not where they are. Sometimes they're in the same town, sometimes the same institution."

Notice of the honor came completely out of the blue for Joyce and Young-

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Kathy De La Torre/The New Mexican

Tom Joyce, standing at the entrance to his blacksmith shop Friday, is one of 24 recipients of the 'genius awards' given annually by the MacArthur Foundation Fellows Program to the most creative Americans.

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blood, and that's exactly how the foundation wants it to be.

Fellows are chosen anonymously. No one ever knows if they're under consideration. No one can apply for one. And only foundation staff members know who and where the program's advisers and nominators are.

There is no age limit for the fellowships: The youngest person to receive a fellowship was 18, Socolow said, and the oldest was 83.

But fellowships are only awarded to U.S. citizens working here or abroad or foreign nationals who live in the United States.

Initially, the foundation got in touch with Joyce by having a staff member call and express interest in commissioning a piece of art to honor her father, the artist said.

"I'd been thinking about the project, and she (the staffer) had set up a conference call with me on Monday (Sept. 29) with her father. I'm sitting here waiting for the call when Dan (Socolow) calls and says, 'I have good news and bad news.'"

The bad news was that the commission would not materialize. The good — and much better — news was, of course, the award.

"It caught me totally off guard," Joyce confessed. "After quite a bit of silence on my part, and Dan trying to reassure me that he had the right number, the truth was bared."

"It's a wild thing. I can't tell you what it means to have this opportunity fall out of the sky. There's this feeling of tremendous awe and immense gratitude and yeah, a huge kind of openness."

Asked if she had to pick herself up off the floor when she heard the news, Youngblood laughed. "It takes me a while to appreciate good news. But I had been forewarned I was going to get something, though I didn't know exactly what," she said.

That was because she and her husband, Tom, also a ceramicist, were planning a trip to Costa Rica. A MacArthur staff member — who, like Joyce's contact, had been in touch with her on a pretext — urged them to postpone departure.

"The person I was talking to said, 'Would you please stay in the country a bit longer?'" Youngblood explained. "I said, 'Why?' All she said was, 'It would be worth your while.'"

In their announcement, the MacArthur Foundation identified Joyce as "a blacksmith exploring the expressive qualities of metal, transforming



Daisy Youngblood

the ancient craft into a 21st century art form."

Youngblood was hailed as "a sculptor whose figurative forms in clay and cast bronze convey intense

emotional complexity."

Their compatriots include composer Osvaldo Golijov, archaeologist Guillermo Algaze, Human Rights Watch researcher Corinne Dufka, children's novelist Angela Johnson, science-exhibit artist Ned Kahn and botanist Loren Rieseberg. Other awardees are a pen-and-ink illustrator, professor of biomedical engineering, a conservation analyst, a physicist, a public-health physician, an agronomist, a sculptor and a medieval historian.

The fellows program was one of the foundation's first, according to Socolow. When John D. MacArthur established the foundation in 1978, he said, "I made it. You (trustees) figure out what to do with it."

MacArthur developed and owned Bankers Life and Casualty Company and other businesses. Since 1978, the foundation has granted more than \$3 billion for global security and sustainability, human and community development, the fellows program and general support for public-interest media and Chicago-area arts and cultural institutions.

For Joyce, the award comes at an ideal time. "The uncanny thing about the timing is, every year for the last three or four years, I've taken some time off to do new work. Usually I stay a year, a year and a half backlogged. So it was about a year ago I decided I wouldn't take anything else on" after March 2004. "Then it's free and clear."

Joyce and Youngblood have nothing to do now but decide how they want to use their award money. The MacArthur sets no restrictions on use. Nor does it require reports. And it never publicizes the fellowship recipients further or tries to involve them in special projects.

"We have a hands-off policy with the people who get this," Socolow said simply. "Doing the creative work is their job. Staying out of their business is our job. We provide the freedom and opportunity for an extraordinary journey to explore and create. We're investing in a lifetime."

On the Web

Full listing of 2003 fellowship recipients: www.macfound.org