

Ron & Tam Milostan: The Dynamic Duo of the AABS

By Peggy Kubitz

Ron's generous heart has allowed him to guide our club. It's a big responsibility, and Ron has handled it with grace. His interest in bonsai came about twenty-five years ago when his daughter, Krystine, gave him a Fukien Tea. He planted it in an aquarium where it looked so nice. Sadly, it died in its little glass coffin. He knew he needed help and shortly after that, he joined the Ann Arbor Bonsai Society and realized his artistic interests. Right from the beginning, he got pretty involved in our great club and took over the position of Librarian. Next, he became the Show Chair and with the help of Connie Bailey-Crancer and many others, had a very successful show. We all know the trajectory of that beginning! Bonsai is so complex, yet at the same time so fascinating.



This photo was taken at the set up for Mark Hanner's sale booth at an AABS show. Here are two examples of Ron's unique pottery. Photo by Jay Sinclair.

Ron was inspired, as so many have been, by two great mentors: Jack Wikle and Jerry Meislik. You see, he had gravitated to Matthaei Botanical Gardens, at that time performing menial tasks, but enjoying every minute of it! Volunteering at Matthaei, Ron began to develop his penchant for Chinese Penjing. This style has remained a preference, and can be seen not only in his artistic work on his bonsai, but in his pottery and sculptures, as well. Even at eight years old, taking classes with his father, he remembers looking at the flow and balance of Penjing, picturing himself in the wilderness scene, enjoying the view. It was only natural that his artistic talent was rejuvenated and nurtured by his developing interest in bonsai.

Ron shared a story about the contrast in bonsai styles that awakened his preference for the Chinese design. One day at Matthaei, he was working with Jerry Meislik and really noticed a distinct cloud and wavy Chinese representation in the project. Consequently, he began to also notice the difference in Jack Wikle's skillfully layered Japanese methods. In one instance, both experts worked on the same tree. The end result looked a little schizophrenic in that it had two distinct personalities. While appreciating the incredible style and artistry of both formats, Ron began to realize his own preference for the Chinese Penjing style. Style is unique to each artist and Ron began to enhance his own artistry.

During the first ten to fifteen years of club membership, he was very active and attended almost every workshop, and read every book John Naka wrote. Thriving on the many qualified guest speakers of both the AABS and the Four Seasons Club, he has enjoyed them all, and really can't name one as a favorite. Ron finds that if the topic is bonsai, they all have something interesting to offer. In particular, he liked the demos even more than the workshops. One that was memorable was a Nick Lenz three-day event.



Ron began teaching soon after he joined the club, here with Connie Bailey-Crancer looking on. Photo by Jay Sinclair.

Ron is willing to share his bonsai wisdom with others, and recommends that new bonsai enthusiasts expand their knowledge by acquiring more trees. Thanks for the permission, Ron! Ron is often available at Kurt's Flower Market for the expert drop in on the first Saturday of the month. Sadly, the COVID virus has put the skids on some of our celebrations and activities this year. He advises taking to the internet, reading, attending workshops, and never being afraid to experiment. The AABS club has supported him and so many others. There is a plethora of experience in the club that will elevate your skills!

Bonsai means so much to Ron. His trees are like his personal pets, providing a time for self-reflection, relaxation, and a respite from stress. One can zone out in the bonsai arena or just enjoy a pleasant distraction. He has expanded into



"Kindly Lion" (42 x 45 inches), 2019, by Tamara Milostan. Tam used fabric collage to create this regal beast. She has mixed strips of semi-solid fabrics with those of printed "flowy" patterns, creating a more graphic yet effective look. The high contrast colors also add an overall boldness.

the pottery aspect of the art. As a ceramic artist, for him, it has been compelling to consider creating a pot to fit the tree, or finding a tree to fit the pot. At one time Ron also carved Bonsai and Bonsai related Plant stands from stone. Many members of the AABS may still have some of his creations in their collection as well as the carved wood stands, he was well known for.

It goes without saying that he has had a wonderful support in his wife of thirty-nine years. Tamara is a bonus asset to our club with her generosity in serving as our treasurer, her artistic sensibilities, and her wise counsel. Tamara pursues her own interests in quilting, and belongs to a guild that makes quilts to donate to the Veteran's Hospital in Ann Arbor, to the cancer center in Brighton, to the Foster Care program and to WIC. She has branched out into Art Quilts which are akin to bonsai in that you can spend hours on a quilt and not even

realize the passage of time. But there is always time to pause and appreciate the art of bonsai. Over the years, she has developed a critical eye and helpful opinion to offer Ron on styling of his trees and he returns this by offering valuable critiques on her art Quilts.



*Ron (left) doing a demo at the 2018 Annual Show.
Photo by Jay Sinclair. Tam (right) "Self portrait".*

This couple means so much to AABS! Ron's willing leadership in our club, and Tam's helpful nature allows us to meet so many interesting people with a shared interest, and expand a hobby into a passion. Stay safe, Ron and Tam and thank you for your steady hand and kind guidance!

Previous issues of this publication are located in the [History section of the AABS website](#)

NEXT YEAR: This Series celebrating the 50th Anniversary will continue next year when club meetings resume.

HOW YOU CAN HELP WITH OUR 50TH CELEBRATION

1. To help us in this celebration effort, all Ann Arbor Bonsai Society members present and past, and all others wishing to contribute are invited to submit personal statements (60 words or less) to be published in our Yearbook. Each text contributor is also strongly encouraged to submit a favorite photo (with caption) of a bonsai tree or a bonsai activity to accompany his or her personal statement. (We can scan old prints or digitize color slides for anyone needing this help with old pictures.) [Upload Form is here.](#)



2. Let's all Celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the AABS in style with shirts that have our commemorative logo printed on the front. We have a few shirts remaining which will be shipped upon ordering. Shirts are priced at \$20 which includes domestic shipping. The available colors and sizes (adult unisex) are listed below:*

- Medium: 4 black, 2 grey
- Large: 3 black, 4 grey
- X-large: 1 black, 3 grey

Please Place Your [Order Here](#).

Ann Arbor Bonsai Society

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