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## IWU Art Prof. Wins Ragdale Foundation Residency

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## **IWU Art Prof. Wins Ragdale Foundation Residency**

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. It's a peaceful place?an artists' enclave?where artisans and maestros of various stripes ply their crafts among the prairie, stately elms, attractive gardens, and buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

About 150 artists, writers, and composers will be lured this year to the internationally acclaimed Ragdale Foundation in Lake Forest, Ill.?near Lake Michigan and just 30-miles north of Chicago. Among those artists is Sherri McElroy, associate professor of graphic design at Illinois Wesleyan University.

McElroy was awarded a two-week residency at Ragdale last month, surviving a tough selection process?a competition where only one out of five applicants is accepted to the program. The Ragdale Foundation is the fourth largest artist community of its type in the United States, and the only major one in the Midwest.

"I was thrilled," McElroy said about winning the residency, "because I am a designer by education and have been doing artwork just the past three years . . . so I was really honored."

McElroy's "assemblage" work created during her Ragdale residency will be displayed at an IWU faculty art show next February.

Describing the art form of assemblage, McElroy said: "I always work from a narrative or a specific subject matter attempting to communicate that idea through found objects.

"Let's say I'm approaching the subject of pleasure and pain," she explained. "I try to pick objects as metaphors for pleasure, such as roses, and contrast these with metaphors for pain, such as large thorns from a hawthorn tree. Usually there is some type of narrative included in the art piece, giving the viewer a context for the objects."

Ragdale's atmosphere, McElroy said, gives artists "a perfect opportunity to get a lot of work done in a short amount of time."

The Ragdale artists' colony helps spur creativity, according to McElroy, who added: "I talked with other artists and writers about the power of place and how Ragdale had a perceptible spirit."

McElroy received the award, according to the Ragdale Foundation, in recognition of the outstanding quality of her work. A Ragdale residency, the foundation said, allows artists to maximize artistic work potential.

Acceptance to Ragdale is highly competitive, according to the foundation. Recipients are chosen through an application process, with emphasis placed primarily on evaluation of a work sample submitted by the artist. A panel of professionals in an applicant's artistic discipline evaluates the work.

"A Ragdale residency," the foundation said, "is more than just the opportunity for an artist to create. Ragdale can accommodate up to 12 residents at a time, with room to live and work in quiet surroundings."

Ragdale features eight rooms for writers and four rooms for visual artists and composers, as well as four visual artists' studios. Residents are given the chance to share their ideas and work through informal evening readings and open studios.

"The Ragdale experience," the foundation explained, "includes exquisite natural surroundings of meadow and prairie, wide lawn, and large trees that enhance Ragdale's beauty and seclusion."

Ragdale was established in 1976 to provide a peaceful place and uninterrupted time for working artists. Residencies vary from two weeks to two months.

Ragdale is located on the grounds of Chicago architect Howard Van Doren Shaw's home, which marked its centennial in 1997. Shaw (1869-1926), a graduate of Yale University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, received the American Institute of Architects' gold medal for architectural achievement. Among his creations is Chicago's Goodman Memorial Theatre.

The foundation and its contributors subsidize all Ragdale residencies.

The foundation also sponsors readings, concerts, workshops, art exhibits, and seminars in poetry and fiction writing. Special fellowships for older women writers also are offered.

Ragdale's programming is partially supported by the Illinois Arts Council, the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation, the Sara Lee Foundation, the Lee G. Hall Foundation, Harris Bank of Lake Forest, the Union League Civic and Arts Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, Abbott Laboratories, and the City of Lake Forest, and others.

McElroy has earned two degrees from Illinois State University in Normal: a bachelor of science degree in 1976 and a master of science degree in 1988.

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 2,000 students in a College of Liberal Arts, and individual schools of Music, Theatre Arts, Art, and Nursing. Since 1994, these facilities have been added to the IWU campus: a \$15 million athletics and recreation center, a \$25

million science center, a \$6.8 million residence hall, a \$5.1 million Center for Liberal Arts, and a \$1.65 million baseball stadium.