

Show and tell: bringing back the good old days



Terence and Susan Quinlan discuss their goal and process of creating the event bear artists and collectors only ever dreamed of attending

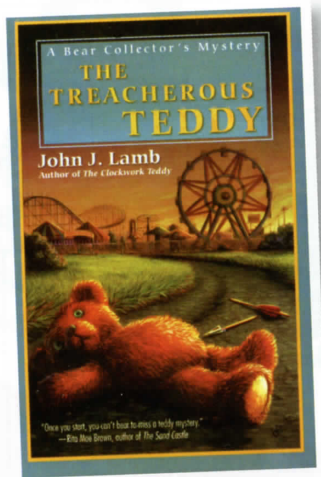


BY LAUREN NIELSEN

dwindling in number and size for many years, teddy bear and doll shows and conventions seem to be at risk of disappearing but no one seems to know how to change things. Susan and Terence Quinlan of the Susan Quinlan Doll & Teddy Bear Museum & Library, took to task the goal of creating a bear event that artists and collectors have only ever dreamed of attending and discuss their obstacles and future outlook of shows like theirs.

The most common explanation to the dwindling number of shows always deals with things beyond anyone's control: 'It's the bad economy' or 'the younger generations just have other interests'. Collectors have less money to spend for events, and airlines' security measures have resulted in artists bringing less to shows (and sometimes experiencing damage to their creations). This brings up the question, "Are the 'good old days' at US teddy bear and doll events gone forever?" Susan and Terry don't think so.

The Quinlans knew that they would have to do things differently to motivate collectors and artists to attend their three-day Artist Doll & Teddy Bear Convention and the Saturday Show & Sale portion that is open to the public. Based on Susan and Terry's experiences of attending events as collectors and listening to what artists and other collectors do and do not like about the events, this is the story of the challenges faced by the Quinlans and how they have been developing their own model over the past five years for conducting a collector's event that one only dreams about attending.



Convenient location

Local proximity and selection are the two major reasons why collectors attend a specific teddy bear or doll event. The first major challenge, then, was to find the best convention location. Philadelphia fit the bill with a heavy regional concentration of collectors, minimized travel expenses with its central location, a nearby international airport and the surrounding area's numerous historic and cultural attractions."



Economical

Many collectors and show attendees have been unable to visit shows in recent years due to expensive convention fees, travel costs and lodging. This weighed heavily on the Quinlans' minds and gave them their greatest challenge – selecting the hotel site. The Clarion Hotel & Convention Center was the only hotel in the Philadelphia area that met all of their conditions. With the airport only 5-10

minutes away, an included hotel-airport shuttle, free parking, sufficient meeting space, affordable rates and reasonable catered food and beverages, The Clarion Hotel was just the place they were looking for. The event's \$95 registration fee for artists and \$195 for collectors goes entirely to promoting the event and all of the optional artist workshop fees go to the instructors. Everything else is free to the attendees.

Largest selection

With smaller shows, it has also become increasingly more common that collectors are finding it harder to find things they want to buy. Because collectors are cutting back on the number of shows they attend each year, the Quinlans decided to centralise as many teddy bear and doll artists as possible in order to provide collectors with one-stop shopping at the largest event of its kind, where a collector can shop for bears and dolls made by 128 artists. For this





to happen, they had to create a database of artists and collectors in order to organize and promote the event. Terence and Susan are currently working on a joint effort between other east coast show organizers to promote each other's shows and events, benefitting each show and the teddy bear and doll industry.

Truth in advertising

The Quinlans are big believers in truth in advertising. If an event says that it is a 'teddy bear and doll' event, they believe that is what the collectors should expect to find. As a result, the Quinlans may be the only ones conducting a teddy bear or doll event that has restrictive policies on the subject. Their policies include a clause that only artists, no vendors, are allowed to show their wares at the

show and 'teddy bears and/or dolls made by the artist must comprise more than 75% of their sales table'. Although the Quinlans' museum contains all types of teddy bears and dolls, they have chosen to strongly support the artists who make bears and dolls by hand.

Evolution of features and activities

Throughout the years, the Quinlans have been taking into account the different features and activities they have offered at their show. The first annual show, held in 2011, featured a variety of options for the enjoyment of artists and collectors including: The Beverly Port and Helen Bullard Awards for Excellence among teddy bear and doll entries, respectively; a limited edition collector pin for all attendees; an artist book signing

and sale; the Artist & Collector Marketplace; a Discount Coupon Raffle; an Education Certificate programme and low admission fees to the Saturday Show & Sale.

Since their first convention, Terence and Susan have added even more activities for attendees, such as a Free Artist's Mentoring programme, door prizes, shopping guides, a Gallery of Workshop Creations, special galleries featuring 'out-of-the-box'" designs and presentations from representatives of five other major artist teddy bear and doll shows and conventions.

This year, the event has been moved to a Friday through Sunday schedule and will be re-branded as a Weekend Event. Numerous new additions will be featured, including some special informative sessions, workshops for spouses of at-

tendees, an artist social and six themed galleries.

Conclusion

After experimenting with the process and content of their annual Artist Doll & Teddy Bear Event each year from 2011-2015, the Quinlans feel that they have a pretty good model in place – something that brings back and improves on those teddy bear and doll events from the good old days. It is their hope that other teddy bear and doll event organisers can learn from their mistakes and successes so the entire world of artists, collectors and retailers will benefit.

● For further information about the 2016 or 2017 Artist Doll & Teddy Bear Weekend Event in Philadelphia, contact the Quinlans at terry@quinlanmuseum.com or (805) 687-8901