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December Marks Inaugural Firing of Rare Anagama Kiln

Holley, Florida – This December, history will come ablaze as the Gulf Coast Kiln Walk Society celebrates the inaugural firing of its newly constructed 32’ wood-fueled Anagama kiln. Festivities surrounding this event include a unique, labor-intensive workshop, *Cultural Adventure in Wood Firing*, featuring renowned ceramic artists Don Reitz and Brian Harper.

Workshop participants will roll up their sleeves and get to work on November 29, learning all aspects of the ancient art of ceramics from loading to firing. Then on December 3, along with the community, they will experience something that dates back 5,000 years – lighting the massive Anagama kiln, which holds upwards of 800 pieces.

Once lit, the kiln will require round-the-clock care and feeding. A team of about 20 people will work in four- to six- hour shifts adding wood and monitoring the fire, which is contained within the kiln and glows so brightly it can be seen from nearly half a mile away. Workers will drop about six cords of wood into the kiln throughout the weeklong firing process.

One cord of wood is 4’ x 4’ x 8’ (neatly stacked) – or about a truckload. Furthermore, a single cord of wood releases the heat equivalent to what is produced by a ton of coal or 200 gallons of fuel oil. Perhaps this helps explain how the kiln reaches its optimum firing level of 2,400 degrees.

The Anagama will cool for about a week leading up to the ceremonial kiln opening on December 17. This is when workshop participants, artists, and the Gulf Coast community will catch their first glimpse of the wares inside. It’s hard telling exactly what they’ll find, except that no two pots will look the same.

“Variables such as airflow, positioning of the pots, kind of clay used, and sometimes plain chance make every piece unique,” said local potter Brenda Stokes, who along with her husband Marty, is the mastermind behind the Anagama. “Wood-burning kilns produce colors and effects that can’t be achieved any other way. I think everyone will be amazed by the beauty we uncover when we open the kiln.”

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Stokes emphasized that this firing event draws on community, as has the process leading up to it. Last summer, for example, the Gulf Coast Kiln Walk Society grounds became a revolving door for artists and local residents interested in the construction of the Anagama kiln.

“Our hope now is to expand ‘community’ to include tourists and artists from all over,” said Kathy Newby, executive director of the Santa Rosa Tourist Development Council. “Being witness to this creative process is such a rare and special opportunity, and we look forward to welcoming visitors from near and far.”

In addition to the actual event, the presence of Don Reitz and Brian Harper stands to attract a crowd. Harper, former assistant to Reitz, led the workshop to build the Gulf Coast Kiln Walk Society Anagama. Both will be present for the workshop and slide presentations and to conduct the historic lighting ceremony on December 3.

“Anyone in the ceramics community already appreciates the gifts Don Reitz and Brian Harper offer,” said Stokes. “They are amazing potters and have helped shape our craft. We look forward to having them here and to sharing their talents with an even greater audience.”

The entire community is welcome to join the Gulf Coast Kiln Walk Society for the inaugural firing on December 3 and for the much-anticipated opening on December 17 (times TBA) at 7507 Buckeye Road, Holley. The 10-day workshop, which includes loading the kiln, lectures, slide shows, and field trips, is also open to the public; however, space is limited to 16 people. To register or for more information, call the Stokes at 850.939.2744 or visit www.kilnwalk.org.

The Gulf Coast Kiln Walk Society is dedicated to the development and education of wood fired pottery. The Gulf Coast Kiln Walk Society is a nonprofit corporation founded to serve the arts community and for the continued advancement and education of ceramic arts.

