

<http://www.stamfordadvocate.com/features/scn-sa-laa1nov08,0,5495822.story>

## ARTISTS WITH HEART

# LAA plans benefit for beloved teacher

**By Abby Luby**  
Special Correspondent

Published November 8 2007

Westport artist Kevin Thomas' near-fatal car crash early last month left the art community stunned. Thomas is a popular ceramist and teacher at the Silvermine Guild Arts Center. At the time of the accident, he was in the process of moving out of his studio of 10 years at the Loft Artist Association in the old Yale Town Lock Factory in Stamford.



Thomas, 40, was in a coma until recently, suffering a concussion and multiple life-threatening injuries. Last week, he was moved out of the intensive care unit at Norwalk Hospital.

Rallying to help Thomas and his painter wife, Elizabeth Hiltz, for what's expected to be a long recovery, local art groups have arranged a benefit and auction. The event, scheduled for Saturday, is hosted at Silvermine and involves the Clay Arts Center, Lakeside Pottery and LAA.

"Artists are coming together to help their own," says Lina Morielli of the LAA. "But it really has to do with Kevin. He is a very large personality and a tremendous presence. He's a fabulous teacher with incredible energy."

Thomas, 40, started teaching ceramics at Silvermine about 11 years ago, says Silvermine Art School director Anne Connell.

"Kevin is the heart and soul of the ceramic studio. He was the first person to rebuild the kiln," she recalls. "His classes always fill up during the first hour of registration. Now that he's in the hospital, I will be using three teachers to replace him."

Thomas also encouraged public school students in Greenwich, Stamford and

Wilton to visit his studio as part of school tours. A nurturing and caring teacher, Thomas is dynamic and talented, says Connell. "Kevin's accident was very sad and shocking," she says. "I greatly value him as an employee and he is a wonderful asset to the center."

Thomas' work includes functional pottery as well as more abstract and sculptural pots with textured surfaces of luminescent greens and reds.

Many know Thomas as one who reaches beyond the art community, donating his work and support to such local groups as Stamford's Child Guidance Center and Sexual Assault Education Center.

"Kevin was the former Loft Artist president and always opened his studio for events and performances," says Morielli. "He is really hard-working. He would write grants for the city arts partnerships program while working at an incredibly high level for several hours a day. The idea that anything could happen to his mind - his creative source - is just overwhelming to us. This accident could change his life."

Robin Axness, Silvermine's director of marketing and development says the immediate reaction to the tragic news of Thomas' accident was like a family pulling together in a time of crisis.

"The staff and students called me and wanted to know how they could help with running errands, getting food," she says. "What evolved from that was trying to help with Kevin in the long term. The response was so genuine, nobody could move quickly enough."

Silvermine offered their space for the auction, says Axness. The benefit will feature a live and silent auction offering works by Thomas and work donated by local artists. Artists and art school faculty from Silvermine have also donated their work to be auctioned by Silvermine artist, David Dunlop.

"We've invited different artists working in various media to donate one item," says Axness. "We are getting much more than we can handle - but there will be at least 100 pieces for the auction." Money will also be raised through straight, tax-deductible donations and will be placed in a restricted fund managed by Silvermine.

\*

what: Fundraiser/auction benefit for Kevin Thomas

when: Saturday, 6-10 p.m.

where: Silvermine Guild Arts Center, 1037 Silvermine Road, New Canaan

contact: 966-9700