



*Cheresse Weaver at work. In addition to throwing pots, she sculpts.*

In 1986, Weaver and his wife Cheresse, also an accomplished artist, relocated to Alaska, where he worked with the state crime lab at Anchorage. There, within two hours of releasing one of his first composite sketches to local media, the victim was identified by four people. Composite portraits develop as a victim or witness to crime describes a person from memory to an artist who then renders a drawing to be used for identification purposes. Weaver also performs skeletal facial reconstructions using clay to recreate facial characteristics from unidentified skulls.

While in Alaska, it's no surprise that Weaver continued art studies, this time with Iouri Sidorenko, a Russian master iconographer and Old World painter.

"I saw an exhibition of his work at a public library and was amazed. It had such richness, density of color, clarity of realism, strength. It was everything I wanted in my work. We worked together then and even now. While he lives in Carmel, Calif., he's considering moving to West Virginia, too."

David and Cheresse Weaver and their two young daughters, Rachel and Anna, relocated to West Virginia in

1993. They live on 16 acres near the New River Gorge bridge, the Gauley River and the beautiful Monongahela National Forest. The two were high school sweethearts in Ohio where they skipped classes to visit the Toledo Art Museum where they examined in awe, the work of the Old World masters like Rubens and Van Dyke.

The Midland Trail Gallery they own is both a showcase and studio for their work, and that of a select few other artists of the region. While David devotes time to painting and pottery, Cheresse works on sculpture and porcelain and stoneware pottery. The gallery houses a pottery studio, painting spaces, and a darkroom. David also offers one-man-shows at galleries in Maui, Reno, and Alexandria. His work is included in many private and corporate collections. In addition to oils, David offers a selection of limited edition lithographs.

But even as Weaver concentrates on his painting, he is active in assisting the West Virginia State Police in finding the identity of a John Doe found in nearby Paint Creek.

"We are hoping, that through

media exposure, someone will recognize this man, claim him as family, and help us close the case," says Sergeant Dale Payne.

But Weaver pursues fine art.

"I would love, along with Iouri and others who love Realism, to bring back a new Renaissance," he says. "It's not an easy way to paint; it takes two years to learn the technique. But after studying it, you see differently. It sounds strange, but after painting this way, your mind perceives things differently. The old Flemish painters knew it; the Hudson Valley painters knew it. Many modern painters avoid it because it's so time consuming. It's a layered technology, sometimes with seven layers. And each layer must dry before the next. There are things about painting this way that are unlike anything else in this world. Unless it's a crime investigation. Isn't that funny?"

The Midland Trail Gallery is located at the intersection of U.S. 60 and W.Va. 41, just north of Babcock State Park. Hours are 10 a.m.-7 p.m., Tuesday through Sunday, or by appointment. For more information, call 304/438-8649. ♦