Currently, New Beginnings is launching a “Transition to the Future” campaign. The point of this campaign is to raise funds to keep New Beginnings alive after Randolph’s eventual retirement. “We will need an infusion of money to expand outreach, enhance our Web site, explore social networking opportunities and add staff,” Randolph said about the campaign.

“Transition to the Future” is working to raise money to ensure “a place for people in the throes of a life crisis like divorce to meet, share the wisdom of their experience, and to see that it is possible to survive.” For more information about New Beginnings, visit www.newbeginningsusa.org, and remember, “an end is also a new beginning.”

Collecting America’s Past

BY THERESA MONACO AND MICHAEL CANE

“We live in an Ikea world,” says Jack O’Brien. “The furniture is so heavy and expensive, but it’s not going to last.”

O’Brien, who earned his M.A. in English at the University of Delaware in 1996, considers the story of antique furniture and decorative arts to be the “story of America.” Part of America’s history is revealed in the book, Harbor & Home: Furniture of Southeastern Massachusetts, 1710–1850, which O’Brien helped research and write.

Harbor & Home examines the traditions and history of craftsmen and furniture-makers of the southeastern Massachusetts area in the 18th and 19th centuries. “At that time, Boston, Newport, and New York had been established and codified,” says O’Brien. “But the region below Boston down to Newport had never been studied.”

O’Brien co-wrote an essay that focuses on six artisans of the region, like Lemuel Tobey, a cabinetmaker who temporarily dropped his tools to fight in the Revolutionary War. Today, we can still admire Tobey’s woodwork and its historical significance. About our own culture, O’Brien notes that many people prefer a “newer, cleaner look” with mass-produced furniture.

In addition to the essay, O’Brien contributed almost a quarter of the entries in the furniture catalogue, which displays many of the artisans’ work. Each catalogue entry consists of a beautifully detailed picture, the maker’s name (if known), the object’s name, and the area and date of origin.

O’Brien was invited to join the Harbor & Home project by Brock Jobe, professor of American decorative arts at Winterthur and graduate professor of material culture studies at the University of Delaware. O’Brien first learned about the Winterthur Fellowship program through classmates in his graduate course, “Book Trade in the Age of Shakespeare.”

“It (Winterthur) was amazing—the house was filled with decorative arts, especially American furniture, which is what I really enjoyed,” he says. O’Brien never entered the Fellowship program, but he did meet many influential people including Jobe, who later invited him to help with the book. Published earlier this year, Harbor & Home is quickly becoming a much sought-after book by antique collectors. But O’Brien says many people can enjoy the book, especially those “interested in the period, the discovery, or the region.”

Earlier in May, the Winterthur Museum held an exhibition (by the same name) showcasing many of the rare pieces in Harbor & Home. O’Brien participated in the 2009 Sewell C. Biggs Furniture Forum, which also took place at Winterthur this past spring.

O’Brien developed many of his research skills while earning his M.A. in English at the University of Delaware. Under Professor George Miller, then chair of the English department, he helped research and transcribe letters written by a Delaware Civil War soldier named David Lilley.

O’Brien claims that his graduate research provided him with the tools and skills he now uses in researching antique furniture and decorative arts. “As I assisted Professor Miller, I was doing historical research, document research, and also genealogical research, which I’ve had to do many times working on Harbor & Home,” he says. “I would...
Northeast Auctions. He, of course, can from his research work as an intern for his success to the experience he gained role in helping students enter their de the importance of internships and their students, O’Brien was quick to discuss American culture.

Of the most sophisticated furniture in relatively unknown, but produced some furnituremaking in the New Bedford area is a show about New Bedford furniture in the 18th century. This period of furniturereviewed a new auction house, due to open May 2010 in New York City.

The New Bedford Whaling Museum has also asked O’Brien to help organize a show about New Bedford furniture in the 18th century. This period of furniturereviewed furnituremaking in the New Bedford area is relatively unknown, but produced some of the most sophisticated furniture in American culture.

When asked what advice he had for students, O’Brien was quick to discuss the importance of internships and their role in helping students enter their desired field. In fact, he attributes much of his success to the experience he gained from his research work as an intern for Northeast Auctions. He, of course, cannot forget his experience as an English graduate student at the University of Delaware.

Though he does not claim to be a great writer, O’Brien has helped history come alive through his extraordinary research in American material culture. His interest in history has taken him far beyond literature (and his home in Massachusetts). “I love what I do and I get to do it every day,” O’Brien says. “I learn every day.”

BOOKS, BARKS, AND BLOGS

Kathryn Miles’ New Book, Adventures with Ari, Looks at the World through a Canine Naturalist’s Eyes

BY KRISTIN ZINSMEISTER AND ALEKSANDRA SUJEPCEVIC

When writing a book, most authors spend hours researching a topic and organizing the plot. When Kathryn Miles wrote her book, however, her furry, four-legged friend Ari created the storyline and conducted the research for her. Ari, a husky-jindo mix, is a canine naturalist, a dog “tuned-in to the natural world.” Miles, who coined the term “canine naturalist,” found inspiration in observing Ari’s exploration of the outdoors. “I became more observant while outside because of Ari’s sense of the outdoors. For instance, I watched her have conversations with chipmunks. She has a very sophisticated means of making sense of the world.”

Miles began journaling about her experiences with Ari, and these private journal entries soon developed into the basis for her newly released book, Adventures with Ari. Using a memoir format, Miles, a University of Delaware alum, wrote about the journey that she and Ari shared side by side while living in a rural Maine town.

Miles, a University of Delaware alum, wrote about the journey that she and Ari shared side by side while living in a rural Maine town. An excerpt from the book was featured in Best American Essays; it also received good reviews from Bark Magazine, as well as from her dog-loving comrades.

Miles’ friends and family were excited, but not surprised, about the book’s release. They recognize that Miles, an environmental writing professor at Unity College and former journalist, knows how to produce a well-written document that caters to its audience. Her mother was especially supportive while Miles promoted the book: “She always made sure that everyone had a copy,” Miles added.

Before the book was released, Miles publicized it by creating her own blog site, Adventures with Ari: Life as a Canine Naturalist and by visiting other dog blogging sites, such as Dogster, Puppy Wars, and Dogs and Blogs to promote it. She also spoke several times on national radio programs and made television appearances.

Miles combined this publicity work with her behind-the-scenes responsibilities, which included writing, rewriting, and revising. Although her agent helped with the edits, Miles confessed that “rewriting and revising were my least favorite parts of the entire process.” Miles’ agent had been a senior editor with Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, so the edits were thorough, but Miles described her as “the best.” It was all worth it when the book gained success and Ari, the star of the book, gained fame.

Miles followed up the book’s release with a promotional tour in which she and Ari met their readers and signed autographs—Miles used a pen and Ari used a paw. Inspired by the book, many fans told her stories of their own prized pooches, “the most gratifying part of the entire book-writing experience,”

Miles said. “I really had a sense of connection with my readers.”

Miles plans to continue her writing career with a book about an Irish famine ship. As for Ari, she too plans to continue her research of the natural world from a canine naturalist perspective.