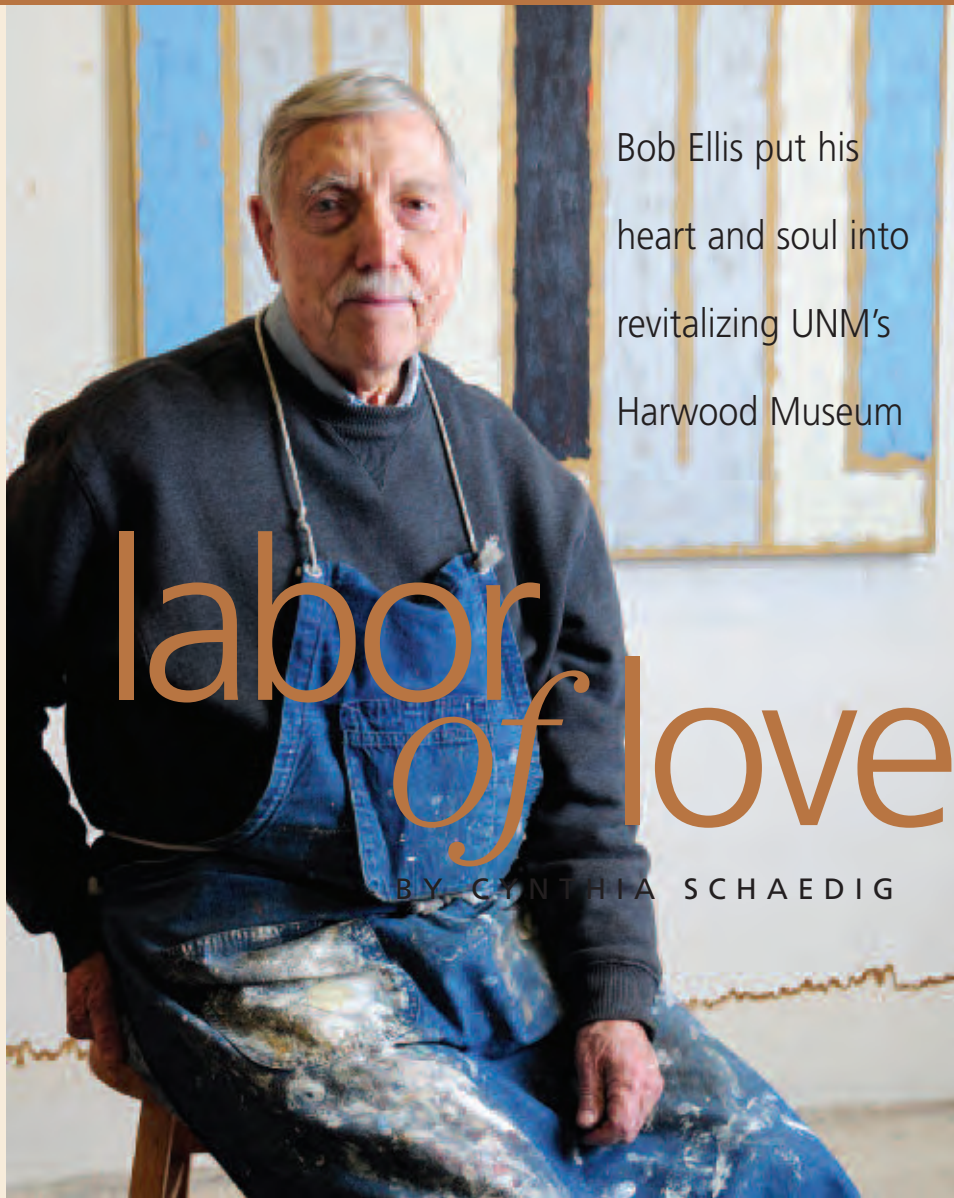


Sixty-eight is a wonderful age to begin a new career. At least, it was for Robert Ellis, who in 1990 took over as director of Taos' Harwood Museum of Art, UNM's oldest art museum and the second oldest art museum in New Mexico, after teaching painting at UNM for 23 years. "Hard telling what would have happened to it if he hadn't taken over," says Penny Rembe, a UNM regent at the time.

Bob came to UNM in 1964 as assistant director of the relatively new UNM Art Museum on the main campus. He later served as director, then taught in the art department before retiring in 1987.

Once retired, he moved to Taos to paint. Initially, he had a small house built. Without a lot of money, and recovering from a painful divorce, he did most of the finishing work inside the house and all of the landscaping. Two years later, ready to return to painting, he received a call from UNM Provost Emeritus Chester Travelstead asking him to take over as acting director of the Harwood Museum of Art for six months while the university figured out what to do with it. Bob agreed.



Bob Ellis put his heart and soul into revitalizing UNM's Harwood Museum

# labor of love

BY CYNTHIA SCHAEDIG

Nick Layman

## The Harwood Story

After Burt Harwood's death in 1922, his widow, Lucy, started the Harwood Foundation and Museum in the compound that had been their Taos home. In 1935, the Harwood Foundation and Museum—including buildings, a library, and an art collection—was given to UNM. With its 1937 John Gaw Meem addition, it is on the National Register of Historic Places and the New Mexico Register of Cultural Properties.

The State Legislature's annual stipend to help run the library and museum ended in 1989, and UNM was faced with supporting the museum on its own. The town agreed to run the library, but that left the buildings and the art collection. After a failed

director search and six more months as temporary director, Bob took the position on a permanent basis.

The first couple of years, the Harwood limped along. Bob knew it was not going to get a lot of funding from UNM, so he started raising funds for new galleries on his own.

Bob thought the Harwood library, vacated by the Town of Taos for a new building, would make great gallery space. Asked how much the renovation would cost, Bob told UNM Provost Mary Sue Coleman, "\$400,000," a number he made up on the spot. Then he added, "I'll raise \$200,000." She agreed and the first major renovation of the Harwood since Meem's addition began.

**HARWOOD HERO:** Retired professor and museum director Bob Ellis has had little time to paint while developing UNM's Harwood Museum of Art in Taos.

## Agnes Martin's Magic

Then a wonderful coincidence occurred. Bob reconnected with internationally known artist Agnes Martin, whom he'd encountered years earlier in California. Martin had just moved back to Taos.

One day Bob said to Agnes, "If you ever want to have a show before you ship your paintings to New York, the Harwood would love to do it." Nine months later, Agnes called. She had 10 paintings, the first she had completed since her return to Taos. She invited Bob and his new wife, Caroline, to her studio to see them and told Bob he could show seven of them, only seven.

Bob quickly freed up the Harwood's schedule. He created an eight-sided room out of the gallery by building temporary walls across the corners. The entry was on one wall, and each of the other seven had a single painting hanging on it.

While Bob and his staff were hanging the show, they brought in a chair and had Agnes Martin join them. She sat in the middle of the room and commented as the hanging and lighting proceeded. "The Whitney never lets me do this," she said, obviously pleased.

Halfway through the show, Bob asked if Agnes would donate the paintings, promising her a permanent gallery to exhibit them. She agreed.

The \$1.6 million project was finished in 1997. Bob and the board he'd recruited had raised all of the money except the initial \$200,000 from the Provost.

"I never saw myself as a fund raiser, but when you believe in something, you just talk to people and they give you something," Bob says.

## Opportunity Presents Itself

Bob retired from UNM for the second time in 2001. In the 11 preceding years, in addition to realizing the renovation, expansion, and Agnes Martin Gallery, he had convinced UNM to purchase property for a parking lot, added significantly to the Harwood's collection, and, according to the UNM Foundation, increased the Harwood's endowment from \$11,000 to \$1.4 million.

Six years after Caroline died, Bob began involving himself with a second Harwood expansion, for a gallery in memory of Taos artists Louis Ribak and Bea Mandelman.

Bob's eyes still sparkle and his affection for the Harwood would be hard to miss. "My life seems to have been guided by opportunity," says Bob, now 86. His remarkable track record is a result of this simple philosophy of embracing what presents itself.

# album

America's prison societies. See more at [www.PrisonCoffeeTableBookProject.org](http://www.PrisonCoffeeTableBookProject.org).

**Christine Brown**, '05 BAFA, is curator for the Los Alamos (New Mexico) Historical Museum.

**Trevor Lucero**, '05 BAFA, '08 MFA, had a show of his paintings last summer at the Center for Contemporary Art in Santa Fe. Trevor is an Albuquerque resident.

**Christine Schwatken**, '05 BUS, has joined Daniel B. Stephens & Associates in Albuquerque as marketing coordinator for the sales and communications division. She specializes in technical writing, promotional material development, website design, and customer relations.

**Justin Taylor**, '05 BS, a third-year medical student at UNM, has received a 2008 American Medical Association Foundation's Minority Scholar Award, a \$10,000 scholarship in recognition of his scholastic achievement as well as promise for the future.

**Christina Adams**, '06 JD, has joined Rodey, Dickason, Sloan, Akin & Robb as a member of the litigation department.

**Rasa Herzog**, '06 BS, is now program manager for Youth Link, New Mexico Voices for Children. She makes Albuquerque her home.

**Monica Meihack-Schmutz**, '06 BBA, has joined Granite Transformations in Albuquerque as inside salesperson.



Ion C. Abraham

**Ion C. Abraham**, '07 JD, of Lincoln, Massachusetts, has been promoted to associate at Hamilton Brook Smith Reynolds, an intellectual property law firm in Concord.

## your opportunity

The Harwood Museum of Art has been the centerpiece of Taos art and culture for 85 years. A major renovation and expansion are in the works, including new gallery space, an educational auditorium, additional storage, and expanded retail space. The new gallery, named in memory of Beatrice Mandelman and Louis Ribak, will feature works from the period when the two artists lived in Taos. Many naming opportunities remain. For further information, please call 575-758-9138.