



Artist and auctioneer Archer Mayo calls out and encourages bidding during an event as his wife, Naomi, acts as spotter.

Photo by Michael Peterson

## Making Auctioneering an Artform

*Benefit auctioneer Archer Mayo says life's too short to not be who you want to be*

**By Jeanie Senior**

Well-regarded sculptor Archer Mayo has lived and worked in White Salmon since 2000. These days, however, he has a different gig.

He is a benefit auctioneer, working at fundraisers staged by nonprofits that yield hefty sums for worthy causes.

How does a sculptor become an auctioneer? As Archer tells it, there was a revelatory moment. A few years ago, he donated a sculpture to a fundraising auction for the Hood River Arts Center. That is where he first saw well-known Portland auctioneer Johnna Wells in action.

"I knew at this moment that this was something I wanted to do," he says.

Archer did some informal auctions for nonprofits and decided to get more training.

At the Worldwide College of Auctioneering in Mason City, Iowa, he was part of a student body that included prospective livestock auctioneers, Amish boys learning to do farm auctions, others who would sell airplanes or cars and even some doing benefit auctions.

"There were people who hadn't graduated eighth grade, people with master's degrees," Archer says. "It was a very intense program."

That was about five years ago. Now,



**Left, Archer encourages bidding during a recent fundraiser to support those who lost their jobs after the Underwood Fruit & Warehouse fire in October 2017 put 200 people out of work. Above, although he spends less time sculpting today, Archer's work, such as this oak and copper chandelier hanging in a Montana home, can be found in many homes and businesses.**

Archer does benefit auctions in an area that stretches from Northern California to Washington, including Bend, Portland and the Columbia Gorge.

Events are scheduled on evenings and weekends during what Archer calls auction season—February to the end of the school year, and September through Thanksgiving.

“I get rehired because I can meet the targets pretty well,” he says. “A lot of what I do is like being a goalie on a soccer team.”

He talks with auction organizers about their expectations and to learn the evening’s schedule.

“These things don’t happen without a lot of planning,” Archer says.

Many benefactors attend the auctions, Archer says, “so you want them to have a memorable night. I like to make events unique, really playful. That comes out in my style—events that are fun, spontaneous and have a little bit of a spectacle to them.”

Archer was the auctioneer at the

second annual Masquerade Ball for United Way of the Columbia Gorge, which raised more than \$140,000 last September. Archer also did the auction for the White Salmon Valley Education Foundation, which raised \$120,000.

Because the people who attend benefit auctions are there for a cause they support, bidding can climb to exciting levels.

“Student artwork can go insane, from \$150 to \$6,000,” says Archer, who once sold a parking space in front of a Bend private school for \$10,000, and VIP tickets to Pickathon for \$7,000.

“I love riding the wave of people’s enthusiasm,” he says. “People are already invested because they believe in the organization to begin with. I love it because it’s a triple win: It’s for a good cause, people love buying and I enjoy doing it.”

An auctioneer needs to keep things moving, Archer says, and decide when to continue pushing the bidding.

He works with a team of bid spotters, including his wife, Naomi, who he says is an excellent bid spotter. They work the crowd, answer questions and keep people in the loop.

“I can do sports announcing about

what’s happening in the room to keep people’s attention, and I’m able to go back to the crowd for what’s fun,” Archer says. “I’m there to celebrate them. My job is just to make sure they’re having fun and I’m facilitating it.”

He adds, “I can’t get myself in the way. It’s a Zen thing.”

As for his sculpture, it’s in abeyance. Archer has pieces in residences and businesses. In 2011, he did an international artist residency in western Australia, where he created a body of work based on the shipwrecks of 16th century Dutch spice ships that were lost along the country’s west coast.

But Archer says the plan-an-event-and-then-it’s-over aspect of auctioneering appeals to him.

“Sculpture is this long process of planning, carrying out, selling,” he says. “Everything is heavy. Nothing is in the moment.”

Not long ago, he legally changed his first name from John to Archer, the name he used two years in a row at the Burning Man Festival.

“I thought that really feels good; more me than ‘John,’” he says. “I went through a lot of life transitions. Life is too short not to be the person I want to be.” ■