On June 28, 2008, it was my utmost honor to present E.B. and Maureen Smith and Rolf Achilles with an award fit for three of the most remarkable, influential patrons of stained glass art in America today.

As members and leaders of the SGAA, we are all aware that the mission of our Association is to make certain the survival of the craft of stained glass. We work together to develop guidelines and train craftsmen in order to preserve the distinction of stained glass from other art forms and to advance the craft today and into the future.

E.B. and Maureen Smith and Rolf Achilles are devoted to a similar mission. The SGAA recognizes them with this award for their generous support and promotion of the art. Through the creation and curatorship of the Smith Museum of Stained Glass Windows at Chicago’s Navy Pier as well as the development of the stained glass exhibit at the O’Hare International Airport in Chicago, they implement the mission of the SGAA on a new level.

It began with the Smiths’ desire to collect stained glass art and share it with the public. E.B. and Maureen Smith developed an appreciation for this unique form of art and began collecting beautifully crafted stained glass windows in the mid 1970s. By 1994, they were able to display these rare pieces at the international terminal at the O’Hare Airport in Chicago, Illinois. The stained glass exhibit became so popular that the 43 pieces of museum-quality stained glass art remain a part of this airport today.

The Smiths quickly grew passionate about this independent art form and the reward of “watching so many people marvel at it.” E.B. and Maureen Smith became devoted collectors and went on to develop the largest American museum dedicated solely to the art of stained glass windows.

The Smith Museum of Stained Glass Windows opened in February of 2000 at Chicago’s Navy Pier. The Smith Museum is an exhibition displaying more than 150 individual pieces of stained glass artwork, each illuminated so that colors and details are not overlooked. The glasswork is divided into Victorian, Tiffany, Prairie, Modern, and Contemporary displays.

The museum’s location on Navy Pier further communicates the idea that the art of stained glass can be appreciated in a variety of settings and by a variety of people. The pier, encompassing more than fifty acres, entertains its crowds with gardens and parks, shops, and restaurants. Admission is free. The museum is a terrific example of creative ways to preserve and promote our art.

Rolf Achilles, curator at the Smith Museum of Stained Glass Windows, was also recognized in the award for being such a prominent figure in the stained glass industry. Like the Smiths, Achilles’ passion for the art helps carry out our mission on yet another field.

Achilles uses his vast knowledge of the art and its history not only as curator at the Smith Museum, but also at the Art Institute in Chicago. Adjunct Associate Professor of Art History, Achilles teaches courses on decorative arts and historic preservation.

As a professor, he serves the stained glass industry by spreading interest and knowledge of this art to the next generation. He further promotes the art by sitting on the Board of Directors of the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois, Friends of the Windows, Office of Divine Worship, and the Center for Religious Architecture. He is Chair of the Chicago-Hamburg Sister City Committee and is on the advisory