

Three cheers for the red, white and blue

White House tree contains a bit of Tuscarawas County

By **Rex Huffman**
The Times-Reporter

Posted Dec 12, 2008 @ 12:00 AM

DOVER, OH — When Jeannine Kennedy of Dover received a call last June from Congressman Zack Space's office, little did she realize the call actually WAS for her.

The caller identified herself as Barbara Lawrence and said she had something important to tell Kennedy.

"She proceeded to tell me that every year each of the nation's 435 congressmen asks an artist from their district to create an ornament to hang on the official White House Christmas tree," said Kennedy. "I immediately thought she was calling to ask for suggestions on an artist. I never dreamed it was me they were asking to create the ornament representing our congressional district."

Once the misunderstanding was cleared up, Kennedy was both excited and happy to agree to the request.

In July, Kennedy received a package from the White House containing a 9-inch silver ball which she was to use as the basis for her ornament.

"We (the artists) were told the White House was using 'A Red, White and Blue Christmas' as the theme for this year's decorations, and it was suggested we create an ornament representative of our congressional district or state," said Kennedy.

Kennedy, a former art teacher with the Dover City Schools who now is director of the Tuscarawas County Center for the Arts at New Philadelphia and also teaches at the Tuscarawas Campus of Kent State University, said she immediately thought of doing something representative of the history of Tuscarawas County.

"The first thing that came to mind was the agricultural history of the county," said Kennedy. "I decided to go with a contemporary design, done mostly in blue, using organic shapes. I believe we here in Tuscarawas County are always open to new ideas, and the ornament shows that we are always willing to reinvent ourselves."

Deadline to send the ornament to the White House was Oct. 1, after which Kennedy received an e-mail telling her she would receive an invitation to attend a reception in the White House in honor of this year's artists.

In mid-November the invitation from first lady Laura Bush arrived telling Kennedy she was allowed to bring one guest, so she asked her nephew, Zach Gardner, who teaches history at Indian Valley High. "I thought this would be a good opportunity for him," said Kennedy.

The reception was held this past week, and Kennedy said it was beyond anything she could have imagined.

"It was very elegant, and Laura Bush was very gracious, warm and friendly. The White House staff was very accommodating," Kennedy said.

Those attending the reception had access to every room in the East Wing of the White House. An elaborate holiday buffet was served in the state dining room. Kennedy noted the reception was paid for by President and Mrs. Bush. "No taxpayers' money was used," she said.

"We sat under the (Gilbert Stuart) portrait of George Washington Dolley Madison saved when the British burned the White House during the War of 1812," said Kennedy. "The sense of history really made an impact."

The official White House tree, an 18 1/2-foot Frasier fir from North Carolina, stands in the Blue Room. The tree features 397 ornaments designed by artists from around the United States. Once the holiday season is over, all of the ornaments become the property of the government.

"We were allowed to place our name on the ornament, in very small letters, and also were asked to include our congressional district or state," noted Kennedy.

Kennedy, who had Zack Space as one of her art students while she was teaching at Dover High, said that even though she was asked to create the ornament in June, she was not permitted to tell anyone until after the official unveiling of this year's White House decorations. She had to sign an agreement stating she would not talk about it until after the ceremony.

"I was honored to represent not only our congressional district but also the Tuscarawas County Center for the Arts, the Tuscarawas Campus of Kent State University and the Dover City Schools," said Kennedy. "It's something I'll always remember."