



ABOVE: A bear is chosen at each show to be featured in the advertising and on the show postcards. Winner was Sue Van Nattan.

RIGHT: With Terrie Stong, executive director of GBW.

FAR RIGHT: The first ever URSA Awards winner visited the Tampa Teddy Bear Show 2015, bringing her entry (now sold) in a frame. Sonya Shaw 2005 URSA Awards Competition winner!

BELOW RIGHT: Brownie is the regular GBW that is mainly distributed to Emergency vehicle operators to give to a traumatized child.



marked the 100th, 200th and now over 600 shows, by celebrating with silk printed ribbons for the artists to wear with their name badges. As part of the concept of 'Southern Hospitality,' she would include big green cakes, fruit punch and lots of hugs. Why the green cakes? "Well, that's another story," she giggled. Valerie's eye on the future leads her into all types of new ventures.

Working with the concept of an online teddy bear magazine, she brought 'Bears&Buds' to life, which is now in its tenth year of publication. "We were the first online teddy bear magazine, followed by Teddy Bear Times, and

now others are following suit; all wish to bring teddy bear artists to the attention of world collectors. With online publication we are helping the environment by savings trees because we are not printing on paper."

In addition to the online publication, Bears&Buds sponsors the Annual URSA Awards Competition which is open to all soft sculpture artists worldwide. The contestants do not have to be a member of Bears&Buds to enter. Each piece entered is shown and voted on by the world readers in two rounds of voting. Awards are announced in the October issue of www.bearsandbuds.com

"It is very exciting to see the entries coming in from all over the world. I wish I could cast my votes but I personally find it hard work to pick a favourite out of so many fantastic creations," Valerie revealed. "We have sponsors who add gifts to the prestigious awards package. Winners tell us that when their awards box arrives, it feels like Christmas with all the coloured tis-



sue paper and surprise gifts."

And as the times change, so does the business model for Bright Star Promotions. With the growth of the Internet and with companies like Amazon leading the way in online shopping, platforms were laid for Bright Star Promotions to sponsor online teddy bear shows. "The artists design their own web pages and Bright Star Promotions connects them to the world of collectors," Valerie noted. "Artists who, in the past, only exhibited in one town could now show their marvelous creations to collectors on the other side of the Earth! It's a win-win situation for all."

There is much to admire Valerie for, with her continued efforts to put on shows even when the economy has taken its toll. She knows that artists appreciate that they can still meet the collectors in person, show the collectors their quality work and weave their magical stories about teddy bears. "Of course, now we do not produce 40 shows

a year. The show schedule consists of six person-to-person and six online shows."

Still keeping her finger on the pulse of miniatures, Valerie is selected annually to judge at the Kentucky State Fair in the Dollhouse Division. "The miniature work, in various scale sizes, is always amazing to see. It's hard to judge the entries since skills are often at master

