The ISC Remembers
John Seward Johnson, Jr.

Though a well-known and successful artist, he was not content just creating his own work; his generosity to fellow artists led him to open the Johnson Atelier, a technical school and open foundry that revolutionized access to facilities and control of the medium by the artist.

Seward’s efforts at the Atelier, which continues its innovative approach today, caught the attention of Elden Tefft, founder of the ISC and a University of Kansas professor, who was exploring similar ideas. After hearing about the Johnson Atelier, Elden went to meet Seward. The two shared ideas, and Elden asked Seward to be president of the ISC. This was the beginning of a lifelong relationship with our organization.

As Seward explained, “By the late 1970s, we were all thrilled with what we had collectively accomplished at the Atelier. But we weren’t resting on our long list of successes. In fact, our operation was enhanced by an unexpected, but directly related venture that began when Elden Tefft... drove halfway across the country to meet with me...As soon as Elden told me about his organization and asked me to be part of it, I was deeply moved and eager to jump in and help establish it on firmer ground. Elden’s vision for the ISC had so much raw energy behind it that all the organization needed was further instruction from him, business sophistication, money, and far-ranging open-mindedness.”

Seward guided the incorporation of the ISC, provided our place of residence, and sustained many of our programs. Long after he left the Board, he continued to support our mission, vision, and community; his focus was always on supporting working artists. He gave us office space rent free so we could channel our funds into programming. He helped us to expand the Student Awards program with a featured exhibition at Grounds For Sculpture and funds to travel the show, because he cared about the next generation of artists. He supported the redesign of the magazine, as well as the new ISC website and member platform, which will be launched soon.

These are just a few examples of Seward’s generosity toward other artists. His contributions to the ISC, as large as they have been, are only a part of his legacy. To the larger world, Seward leaves Grounds For Sculpture, a 42-acre sculpture park created for artists to share their work—an achievement that he described as “Cecelia’s and my gift to the community. For 30 years, I have devoted my time and resources to developing this magical place.” It truly is a magical place and is still home to the ISC.

—JOHANNA HUTCHISON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR