



ANTHONY TERRANOVA

“i took my avocation
and made it my vocation”

This year’s recipient of the Farran Zerbe Memorial Award for Distinguished Service calls numismatics his “dream job.”

THE SOFT GLOW of a Tiffany lamp illuminates the 18th-century portrait of Ben Franklin on the wall and the nearby bronze of Cleopatra regarding an asp. Numismatist Anthony Terranova moves slowly about the office in his Manhattan home, comfortable among the historic artifacts he loves—books, prints, paintings, vases, medals. “I like beautiful-looking things,” he says matter-of-factly, his Brooklyn delivery readily discernible. (“If you talk to me for about four seconds, you can figure out where I grew up.”)

Terranova, the 2011 recipient of the American Numismatic Association’s Farran Zerbe Memorial Award for Distinguished Service, is humble about his collections of colonial art, medals and coins. If you ask what attracts him about the period and the style, he replies simply, “It’s what I like.” Indeed, few would guess that behind his casual exterior lies a successful businessman who is passionate about history, numismatics and learning. “Normally, I’m a very private person,” he says. “I don’t seek publicity, and I don’t advertise.”

Terranova’s interest in coins began innocently enough, in true New York fashion. “I got started in numismatics when I was, I guess, 14 or 15 years old,” he says. “I was with a bunch of my friends, and one of them, Joey, asked to see the change in my pocket. So I reached in and pulled out a handful of coins. He looked through them and noticed a nickel. He said, ‘I’ll give you 15 cents for this one.’

“Fifteen cents for a nickel? Yeah, sure, OK,” I said. I took his 15 cents and started to chuckle. I looked at my friends and they were chuckling, too. But, soon I realized they were laughing *at* me, not *with* me. So I said to one of them, ‘Hey, what’s up? How come you’re laughing at me?’

“He said, ‘Joey’s a coin collector. If he gave you 15 cents for that nickel, it’s probably worth more.’ I said, ‘Hey, Joey, how much is that nickel really worth?’ He had a Red Book [*A Guide Book of United States Coins*] in his back pocket and pulled it out. The nickel was a 1925-S Buffalo in Extremely Fine condition valued at about \$2.75. I was, like, fascinated by that.”

Terranova laughs. “I asked Joey, ‘Hey, where can I get one of those books?’ He took me to a coin shop, and I bought one.”

At the time, Terranova’s family owned a bakery. “Every day, my aunt would let me look

PHOTOS: LISA HANCOCK

◀ **AT HOME WITH NUMISMATICS:** A native of Brooklyn, Anthony Terranova enjoys living and working in Manhattan. “It’s the best city in the world,” he says.

“I left the Red Book by the cash register and told my aunt that, from now on, she had to show me every Buffalo nickel she found.”

through the change,” he recalls. “I left the Red Book by the cash register and told her that, from now on, she had to show me every Buffalo nickel she found before giving it out in change. Eventually, I took the book home and started to read it, and that’s how I got started collecting.”

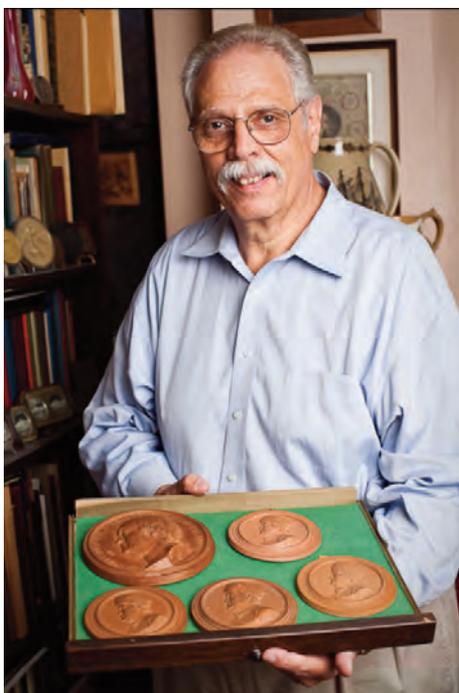
Numismatically, Terranova has very fond memories of the bakery. “I pulled a lot of coins out of that register,” he says, adding that he managed to assemble sets of Walking Liberty half dollars, Standing Liberty quarters and Morgan dollars. “I didn’t have a job, so I was supposed to use my allowance to cover what I took out of the register. After a while, I couldn’t repay the Morgan dollars, so I had to give some of them back. The only dollars that had any kind of real value then were the ones with Carson City mintmarks, so I kept those.”

Terranova actively collects today, “but not federal-issue, U.S. coins. I like Early American coins, but I try to collect them in a manner that doesn’t conflict with my clientele.”

Despite Terranova’s low profile, his customers and fellow coin dealers know



LOTS OF STORAGE: Terranova keeps his medals and a variety of collectibles and books in a room adjacent to his office.



▲ PLAYING FAVORITES: Terranova pursues colonial artifacts picturing Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln or the Great Seal of the United States. Here he displays a collection of terra cotta medals picturing Franklin, created by Jean Baptiste Nini in 1777.

from **KEVIN LIPTON** DEALER & LONGTIME FRIEND

I first met Tony in the mid-1970s at the old Lanham, Maryland, coin show that was held in a dilapidated garage connected to a very unglamorous Sheraton Hotel. I was barely 16 and still traveling to coin shows with my mom and dad. Tony was working with Neil Berman at the time and was very helpful to this pudgy little Jewish boy from New Jersey.

By 1979, Tony and I were very close, and I would take him on numerous road trips. (Tony didn’t drive then and never will.) I always loved to include Tony in my adventures, whether extracurricular or bidding on a six-figure rarity. I’ll never forget our rescue mission in my Ferrari to South Jersey attempting to recover Mike Follett’s stolen coin inventory! We barely escaped, thinking the bad guys were gonna get us!

I loved having Tony around. Though he dressed like Ralph Kramden, his wit and incredible brain fascinated me. I enjoyed watching how people constantly underestimated the “Guido from Brooklyn.” He used this persona to the max!

Tony’s knowledge of colonial-era numismatics is unsurpassed, and to this day I am amazed at how much information is stored in that noggin of his! He is the ultimate “phone a friend” when you need that archaic bit of information.

The only thing greater about Tony than his vast knowledge of numismatics is his generosity and love for family and friends. He is the first person to write a check for any charitable need. I am honored to call him a lifelong friend and a brother.

“You quickly get to know the folks in the business. Everything is predicated on one’s word. It’s very old school.”



from **NEIL BERMAN** FRIEND & FORMER BUSINESS PARTNER

I was working for Robert Hughes and Steve Deeds at Metropolitan Rare Coin Exchange in New York when I met Anthony in the early 1970s. Around 1976 we decided to go into business together. Neither of us had ever worked on our own, and I wasn’t sure we could make it. I was particularly concerned about Anthony’s interest in Early American coppers. I didn’t know how he could make a living buying and selling colonial coins, medals and paper money, but he did. It became evident very quickly that he knew the business—he was really good and didn’t need help from me or anyone else.

Anthony and I went all over the country going to coin shows. We often shared a hotel room, sometimes with two or three other dealers, sleeping in chairs or on the floor. The big challenge on these trips was breaking even.

I have never known anyone as rock-solid as Anthony. He is an honest, reliable man. I have never seen him lose his temper, except when someone stole his collection (which was later recovered). He’s a hell of a nice guy—I don’t know anyone who doesn’t like him.

where to find him and appreciate his honest, no-nonsense approach to numismatics. He is happy to mentor and guide hobby newcomers. “I tell them the same thing anybody would

tell them: Find a series of coins that speaks to you and then pursue it. Read as many books as you can on the subject, and learn about it.”

Terranova himself never stops learning and considers himself fortunate to earn a living doing what he loves. “I made my avocation my vocation,” he says. “If I can buy and sell anything that’s related to Early American history, I’m happy. That’s my favorite stuff.”

When he was 17 years old, Terranova got a job at a Wall Street brokerage house. “I was a troubleshooter,” he says. “I could figure fractions in my head...I was good at math. At the time, it was an OK job—45 bucks a week, you know, which was good money back then.”

After that, Terranova worked about four years as a telephone clerk in the commodities market. “It was a job,” he says. Then, around 1976, friend Neil Berman convinced him to quit, and the two began dealing in coins. They split amicably in 1977, and Terranova set out on his own.

“The coin business is very small and very people oriented,” Terranova says. “You quickly get to know the folks in the business—it’s easy to do. Most coin people are pretty nice, though there are

a few crummy dealers. Everything is predicated on one’s word. It’s a terrific way to do business. It’s very old school.”

“Old school” actually describes Terranova to a T. He believes in hard work, integrity and the value of one-on-one coin dealing, but he concedes that the Internet is changing the game. “Listen, the Internet has its place, OK? It’s created a massive demand for information. The one-on-one is still there to a certain extent—you can talk face-to-face on a computer screen.”

As a kid, that personal interaction was important to Terranova, who regularly visited local hobby shops. “There were about 60 coin stores in New York City,” he says. “If you consider the various boroughs, there were probably even more. Manhattan alone had 25 or 30.”

from **ANTHONY SWIATEK**

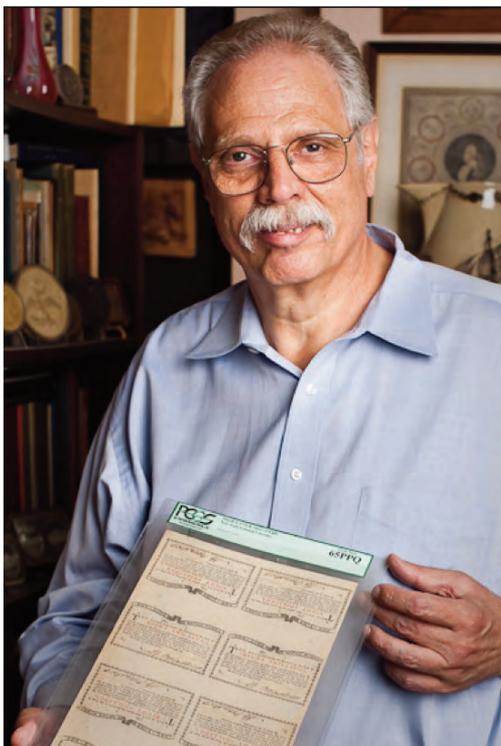
DEALER, ANA PAST PRESIDENT &
2002 FARRAN ZERBE MEMORIAL AWARD RECIPIENT

My sincere congratulations to professional numismatist Anthony Terranova on receiving what many consider the most prestigious award in our numismatic world. I have known him for over 40 years. Anthony has graciously shared his tremendous knowledge with me and all who desire to learn. Kudos to the man who has always been a strong supporter of the ANA. Welcome to the club, my good friend.

“People don’t have time to focus on hobbies, like looking for coins or building cohesive sets of anything.”

But, by the late 1970s and early ‘80s, that number dwindled. “The cost of renting a storefront for mom-and-pop shops became too much,” Terranova explains. “The businesses weren’t cost-effective, so slowly, but surely, they disappeared. Now there’s only two coin shops left on the whole island of Manhattan—Brigandi Coin Company and Stack’s [now Stack’s Bowers].”

He fondly remembers that “Stack’s was like the hub. When I was kid, I didn’t go there because I was intimidated, but when I went into busi-



◀ **NOT SURPRISING**, Terranova collects colonial New York paper money. Here he displays an uncut sheet of eight New York City Waterworks notes, issued in 1776.

ness, Stack’s became one of my favorite customers.”

And, if it weren’t for Stack’s. Terranova would not have met his wife, Mary Ann. In 1983, at lot viewing for a Stack’s auction, he saw her and thought, “Hmm, there’s a girl looking at colonial coins.” Now, after 26 years of marriage, he says, “I’m very fortunate my wife understands and appreciates coins.” She often attends shows with him, as does their only son, Anthony Jr.. “He likes

coins, but he doesn’t collect,” says Terranova, though all three are life members of the ANA.

If the coin-show circuit wears on him, he doesn’t show it. However, Terranova is concerned about what he perceives as a growing lack of interest in collecting and professional numismatics. “It’s a hobby/scientific endeavor of the baby-boom generation. There aren’t many 20-year-old coin dealers—I’d like to see more.”

Says Terranova, “The world is very different today—people know more than they ever did before. New information comes at you every minute. People don’t have time to focus on hobbies, like looking for coins or building cohesive sets of anything.”

Terranova allows that collectors can find the information they need through books and the Internet, but, he says, “If they happen to stumble on a coin club and attend a meeting, they’ll go all the time. There’s nothing like talking with someone in person who shares the same views and interests. It helps you realize you’re not the only nut out there.”

A life fellow of the American Numismatic Society, which is headquartered in Manhattan, Terranova also is a member of the New York Numismatic Club. “I attend meetings every chance I get. Everybody brings items to display and talks about their stuff. It’s great,” he says. “Their in-

from **ERIK GOLDSTEIN**

CURATOR OF MECHANICAL ARTS & NUMISMATICS,
COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG

As a teen traipsing through a coin show in the bowels of the World Trade Center, I laid eyes on a New England shilling and 1794 silver dollar for the first time in Tony’s showcase. Needless to say, I was gobsmacked. In May 1989, when the elevators opened up at Harmer Rooke Galleries on my first day as a “professional” numismatist, Tony was sitting there drinking coffee, as he did every morning. If Tony Terranova, who dwelled at the epicenter of Early American numismatics, could start his day there, I knew I had arrived in numismatic mecca.

With his expert eye, superb taste and bulldog-like tenacity, he has built many great collections, including the American portions of the Joseph Lasser Collection at Colonial Williamsburg. Humble to the core, he’s not aware that he’s also a great teacher and has taught me many, many things. One quip I’ll always remember was along the lines of “I don’t grade colonials, I price them,” phrased as only Tony could. Within that statement, reading between the lines, are the true guidelines to appreciating these Early American coins.

On this occasion, I’d like to thank Tony for his tireless numismatic work, his enduring legacy, his guidance and his friendship...and offer a hearty congratulations, too!

“Collectors and the hobby are everything. Without them, there would be no coin business.”

terests are very eclectic—primarily ancients, but also tokens, medals, fractional currency, paper money ... all kinds of topics.”

Because he believes in education and the fraternity of numismatists, Terranova is a strong supporter of hobby organizations. “I love the coin business and the hobby, and the American Numismatic Association and other big coin clubs nurture them. I think such organizations are very, very important. If I can support them—if I can afford it—I’m happy to do it. Collectors and the hobby are everything. Without them, there would be no coin business.”



▲ **DIVERSE INTERESTS:** Terranova stands before a vintage Tiffany lamp; a Nicholas Cochin painting of Ben Franklin in a fur cap, from the late 1700s; and an Isadore DeRudder sculpture created in 1895.

from **ERIC P. NEWMAN**

FRIEND & COLONIAL NUMISMATICS EXPERT

Our honored professional numismatist
Operates without a staff.
His superb mind as a specialist
Prevents him from making a gaff.

He helps others enjoy varieties,
Reducing some of their anxieties.
The word order of *constellatio nova*
Is based on the name *Terranova*
(And because he lives in *Eborac Nova*).

Our amazing, sharp-eyed Tony
Can easily detect a phony.

Cheers for our ANTHONY TERRANOVA!
He is our numismatic idol and casanova.

In particular, he appreciates the many specialty clubs that operate under the ANA umbrella. “They delve into original research, discover new items and documents. That’s wonderful...I love all that.” The key, he says, are the members who make up those organizations. “They actually like to dig through stuff and share their findings.”

Reading, collecting and chatting with friends fill his leisure hours, although he’s not anxious for more free time. “I’ll never stop working in numismatics,” Anthony Terranova says. “I retired in 1977, when I went into business. Why would I want to do anything else? Being a coin dealer is a dream job. It’s a lovely world to live in.” ■

from **JIM HALPERIN**

CO-CHAIRMAN, HERITAGE AUCTION GALLERIES
& PAST ANA GOVERNOR

Tony is the sweetest guy. He’s very honest and extremely generous with his time and knowledge. He is a walking encyclopedia, and I’m always astounded by his vast knowledge. Tony has really great instincts and good business sense, but he’s also very modest. People don’t realize how successful he is.

An empathetic man who genuinely likes people, Tony makes time for everyone. He’s very open and accessible. He is a steadfast friend—everyone likes him. I couldn’t be happier that the ANA is recognizing Tony Terranova with its highest honor, the Farran Zerbe Memorial Award.