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National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts
SUMMER 2008 www.nceca.net 1.866.266.2322

NEWS LETTER

NCECA: On the Road to CHINA

Richard & Joe Go to China

For ten days in June, intrepid traveling duo, **Joe Molinaro** and **Richard Burkett**, visited China in anticipation of NCECA's upcoming **China Symposium** in Jingdezhen, People's Republic of China.

Joe and Richard have traveled together numerous times on art and ethnographic research trips (see *Ceramics Monthly*, May 2008), and their experience and savvy served them well this trip.



A day's work, greenware drying: WVU's studio facility at Jingdezhen Ceramics Institute

'Having just recently returned from China, I'm really excited about the Symposium,' says Molinaro. 'We left with the feeling of everything ready and in place.' However, it wasn't without long days of navigating through financial negotiations, site inspections, programming and tours of facilities and conference venues. In the end, Joe and Richard were able to successfully secure agreements for



A master glazes

what promises to be an extraordinary and historic NCECA event.

From their arrival in Shanghai (which can include visits to the Shanghai Museum of Art and the art and antique market), to the Symposium itself, hosted by the Jingdezhen Ceramics Institute, attendees will fully experience the Porcelain Capital of the World! In addition to extensive programming, the Symposium will offer gallery openings, gala events, and visits to local ceramic museums, studios and factories. For more information about the China Symposium, visit NCECA's website at www.nceca.net.

Below: attendees will be amazed by the handmade brushes in local markets; it's Jingdezhen, after all.



CERAMIC ART CRITICISM: At the Core of Clay

THE EMERGENCE OF CRITICISM

If you attended the 2008 Pittsburgh NCECA Conference, you may have noticed something in the programming: a subtle shift toward critical thinking and discussion. Indeed, the first lecture of the conference, Ted Adler's *The Function of Theory*, set a stage that would see five lectures and panels address criticism and content by mid-afternoon, and that was just Thursday. Significantly, this was not an intentional strategy of NCECA's conference program committee; the reason these presentations were selected for Pittsburgh is because the proposals had merit. And, as it turns out, a lot of people are thinking about ceramics criticism.

THE RELEVANCE OF CRITICISM

The *Art Versus Craft* debate has been around for the last 50 years, and while this argument is no less relevant today, the burgeoning insistence of ceramic art criticism speaks volumes. In this *Postmodern* world where an object's medium no longer precludes it from a seat at the art table, the *Renaissance Hierarchy* construct, though yet existent, is not always apropos. For many years, Jim Romberg, studio ceramist, educator and NCECA Board member, has been a champion of critical thinking and writing in the clay world. Now, at the point for NCECA's ceramics criticism initiative, Jim has

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Obviously the long history and development of criticism around painting and sculpture are invaluable and essential resources, but it also creates a difficulty that might blind us to what needs to be fashioned for contemporary ceramics.

-Jim Romberg

Criticism equivocates the normative structures while exploring the potentiality of the new. If successful, the gap between the work's claims and the viewing public closes. The more socio-cultural attitudes change, the more accepting the field is toward experimental work, the more it will develop and understand itself within the context of the discourses of society, culture and art.

-Adam Welch

written the following article, while inviting four clay artists to weigh in on this topic.

THE DIFFICULTY OF CRITICISM by Jim Romberg

As criticism becomes more and more a part of the discussion around contemporary ceramics it is apparent certain difficulties arise that if discussed and overcome will greatly enhance the effectiveness of this tool of analysis and interpretation.

There have been many explanations given for the lack of criticism in contemporary ceramics. Everything from the fear of loss of friendship to the absence of a common vocabulary have been put forth. All of these explanations are important parts of the puzzle and each one gives us an insight into why we are where we are and what directions we might take in the future to promote criticism in our field. Significant inroads have been made by various authors into the field of criticism in ceramics but as yet these have remained as singular efforts and there are significant difficulties which remain.

The first of these is the fact that a cohesive well-developed instrument for analysis and interpretation in contemporary ceramics does not exist. So when the discussion turns to criticism we have no past experience or established body of knowledge to draw upon. We are "at sea" so to speak and the compass and sextant of criticism have yet to be invented. Hence, difficulty number one: what we are trying to put in place does not yet exist. Many parts and experiences are at our disposal but a cohesive critical framework upon which to build an effective viewpoint in the field has yet to be created. This has created a very fertile opportunity, but also leads to a certain discomfort and confusion about exactly where we are trying to go. Accepting this confusion can lead to some very rich dialogue.

Those working in the field have all encountered critiques and judgments of success and failure. And many who now work with clay as their expressive medium have come up through the ranks of "art" criticism around painting and sculpture. Obviously the long history and development of criticism around painting and sculpture are invaluable and essential resources, but it also creates a difficulty that might blind us to what needs to be fashioned for contemporary ceramics. When criticism is mentioned, its existence in other fields can

become an intellectual obligation leading to a stance based on the presumption "I should know what criticism is," and the admission of ignorance regarding its application to ceramics becomes socially unacceptable.

The territory we are exploring - criticism in ceramics - is indeed a new one and it offers the potential of new insights and sources of inspiration, as well as expanding the participation of ceramics in our culture. It is difficult and it will take time to fashion this instrument. A stance of curiosity and energetic investigation which welcomes new approaches can fashion a vital and inclusive dialogue that will bring new expression and understanding to the field.

THE ROLE OF CRITICISM IN CERAMICS by Adam Welch

Ceramic criticism is the written or verbal expression of an analysis and judgment of a work made with clay or ceramic components and whose content is reflective of a mindfulness of the discourse. Criticism is the means to disclose the work to a public who might never 'see' the work - revealing the worldview the work expresses. Criticism has both descriptive and evaluative elements. Description is necessary to begin to visually understand and judge aesthetic quality. This is the most fashionable approach utilized in ceramics, which some take a step further to include procedural technique, forsaking conceptual implications. How something looks does not fully answer the conceptual question, just as answering the conceptual question does not describe the work; one cannot truly understand a work without addressing the vehicle that delivers that meaning. Description guides the reader to the critical component of the work, but appearance and/or facticity is not synonymous with a contemporary understanding of aesthetics.

Criticism is not merely a tool to elevate an artist or a work of art's prestige. Though criticism can contribute to an artist's success, criticism is more than a conduit for maintaining or establishing market value. Criticism explains a work's relevance and why it does what it does and how it has gotten to be what it is. Criticism facilitates the understanding of a work as an expression of values and beliefs of society. In a way, criticism seeks to articulate this consciousness through the concept within the works. Here criticism serves a legitimizing function, explicating the social

role and revealing the inner nature of the work. Criticism equivocates the normative structures while exploring the potentiality of the new. If successful, the gap between the work's claims and the viewing public closes. The more socio-cultural attitudes change, the more accepting the field is toward experimental work, the more it will develop and understand itself within the context of the discourses of society, culture and art.

INTEREST IN CERAMICS CRITICISM by Ted Adler

The burgeoning interest in critical perspectives in ceramics seems to signal a changing sense of what ceramic practice is and how its quality or value might be assessed. As conversations develop around this issue, it should be kept in mind that such changes are not only inevitable, but necessary to the vitality of Ceramics as a field. They have happened before and they are happening now. That being said, it is equally imperative that these conversations be entered into with an awareness that engaging criticism is not simply a matter of finding notable critics to elevate public perceptions, or creating a Trojan horse with which to access broader gallery representation. Commercial and critical interests are not mutually exclusive, but they are not the same.

Criticism is a way of approaching subject matter as both a maker and a viewer/user with a curiosity that is, in essence, a kind of applied



Ted Adler leads off in Pittsburgh

skepticism. Questioning our own assumptions about what our work is and does is a good first step. Challenging the status quo about how ceramics is viewed and used is another. History and tradition not only allow for self-examination and innovation, they demand it for the sake of their own furtherance. What good to stand on the shoulders of giants, if we cannot see beyond our noses?

ANTI-THEORY IN CERAMICS CRITICISM

by Hunt Prothro

Everyone who has heard my NCECA talks in the last couple of years, or anyone who has ever taken a class from me, knows that I have no theory of art. I think anything or any act could be made into what would be called art. Walking becomes art if it is so choreographed. Talking becomes art if it is so spoken or written. All work could become art in the hands of one capable of producing it. Last summer, in London, Matthew Barney even produced a work of theatrical/performance art in which defecation became art. On the other hand, as the saying goes, 'you can't make cookies out of dog shit.'

So, the important distinctions in life and art are not between food and excrement, or between walking and talking, or between painting and pottery, but among the necessarily succinct and unique qualities of which each moment, or thing, or act is possessed and why some of these qualities are simultaneously attractive to most people, or, in some cases, perhaps even to dogs.

Art existed long ago and we can make these same qualitative distinctions among like pieces from the same culture, or at least presumably from the same period of time and place, without knowing anything about that ancient culture. And, given new, so called *advanced works of*

So, the important distinctions in life and art are not between food and excrement, or between walking and talking, or between painting and pottery, but among the necessarily succinct and unique qualities of which each moment, or thing, or act is possessed and why some of these qualities are simultaneously attractive to most people, or, in some cases, perhaps even to dogs.

-Hunt Prothro

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*...in pottery, as
in other forms of
ceramic art, the
focus for critical
discussion is the
work's intent,
meaning, and
success.*

- Mary Barringer

art, nearly anyone, trained or untrained, can tell when shown an array of similar work, which ones are lame and which ones are interesting, which is a pretty good start toward being a work of art. Without interest, no narrative of meaning is sufficient to establish any authoritative quality.

Works are sometimes described as art to their disadvantage. I prefer much more descriptive qualifiers. It's always best to say what something is: a performance piece, a pot, an assemblage, a painting, a bridge, a pile of rags, some droplets of olive oil photographed cleverly on a scum-coated pond, whatever, and let everyone else figure it out. Or pay for it.

Wanting to spend some time figuring things out is probably one of the qualities we most expect from a work of art.

Talking about criticism, or theory, is also interesting. However, it doesn't have anything to do with describing a new form, which, like creativity, has got to be unexpected. It can only describe the varied qualities these works will have to have if anyone is going to pay any attention to them. Sometimes, works of meaning, and people, do get lost in history and attention is not paid, but, so is there a path to

oblivion in every life and theory can't really be responsible for everyone or every work of art produced. Any talk about theory has got to reflect the reality of learning. A transformative clarity finds expression in art because this is what the mind does and it is a capacity of our deepest desire. From a certain point of view, art criticism isn't really about art; it's about describing what's in the way of all form becoming mind and, therefore, impassioned art.

THE ROLE OF POTTERY IN CRITICISM by Mary Barringer

As the discipline of ceramics develops a critical language for itself, makers of functional pottery can and should participate in the project. Industry having made utility *per se* a matter of choice for ceramists, in pottery, as in other forms of ceramic art, the focus for critical discussion is the work's intent, meaning, and success. Potters have both participated in and stood apart from the values and language of art criticism, which was developed largely for painting, but recent expansion of critical concerns to include context, performance, and interactivity can apply to many of pottery's fundamental qualities. Equally importantly,

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The **NEWS** reports on the latest from the ceramics scene in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, but it also includes what is going on in other countries in Europe as well as internationally.

This is where you can find the most important dates for competitions, events and new developments.

PORTRAITS OF ARTISTS form the main part of the magazine. Craftspeople, designers and artists working with ceramics are presented with their work, their methods and techniques, and their artistic careers.

Reports about current **EXHIBITIONS, WORKSHOPS AND SYMPOSIA** are the second focal point. In **FORUM**, philosophical and historical topics are taken up, explained and discussed. In **HISTORY**, interesting historical developments in ceramics are covered.

Other permanent sections in **NEW CERAMICS** include:

KNOWLEDGE & SKILL - with techniques, new developments and the necessary background knowledge. **CERAMICS & TRAVEL** shows the way to ceramically interesting destinations. **GALLERY GUIDE** lists dates and details from European and international galleries. **BOOK REVIEWS** covers the latest publications and offers standard works for ceramics.

And we give listings of **COURSES, MARKETS** and **ADVERTISEMENTS**.

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pottery as a whole bring an engagement with daily life, the marketplace, and clay's long history to their studio practice, and thus can help reorient critical discourse toward a larger audience. While some may see this as a liability, potters by their immersion in an interactive artform stand for a criticism that values clarity and communication.

**So, where do we go from here?
Look on Page 8 for our
CERAMICS CRITICISM CHALLENGE!**

**A Word from Morgan O'Brien
NCECA's Executive Director**

Dear Fellow Members,

Welcome to the second edition of our critical thinking-oriented Newsletter. In our last issue, we introduced the idea of a continuing, open discussion on issues related to criticism. In this issue, we take that discussion a step further, with short commentaries on what critical discussion means to some of our members. In addition, we feature an article by Jim Romberg, entitled *The Difficulty of Criticism*.

As artists who work in such a tactile medium, we can sometimes find it hard to make time for the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of our craft. NCECA is committed to fostering critical discussion, and to helping you find the time by bringing it to your door in this periodic publication.



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We believe this form of energized exchange is central to our educational mission, and to our advancement as artists.

An important part of making it work is your participation and feedback. Please enjoy the thoughts of Jim Romberg, Ted Adler, Adam Welch, Hunt Prothro, and Mary Barringer, and let us know what you think. We hope you respond to the *Ceramics Criticism Challenge!*

Best regards, Morgan

**STUDIO TIPS:
Moisture Control!**

Well, it's that time of year again, when some parts of the country get hot and dry and you have to think about controlling the moisture content of your work. If you don't have the luxury of a damp box, consider the following:

Deluxe: An old refrigerator makes a great damp box; they're designed to resist rust and seal tightly!

A Favorite: Use a clean 5-Gallon (or smaller) bucket; put your work on a flat, waterproof surface (glass, Formica, plastic), spray the inside of the bucket with water and put it over your work. Place a weight on top (brick) and it will keep your work fresh & moist for weeks at a time!

Get Plastered: Pour a 2-inch thick slab of plaster in the bottom of a plastic or styro cooler, or in a snap-top storage tub or container. When the plaster cures, you will be amazed at how much water the plaster can absorb (pour in a quart and see what happens), while maintaining an even humid atmosphere.

Have a Studio Tip? Send it to:

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The next Newsletter will be distributed in October, 2008.

Advertising

Deadline:

Mon. Sept. 29th

Writer's Deadline:

Fri. Sept. 19th

Unsolicited manuscripts are welcome and all will be read; for writing guidelines, Email: Marko Fields, Publications Director, at fields@csp.edu

Questions?

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A Letter from Skeff Thomas, NCECA President

To the membership-

I would like to extend a warm summer greeting to all of, and want to share with you an update on the state of NCECA as we prepare for a dynamic upcoming year of programming and exhibitions. We will be hosting the 43rd Annual Conference in Phoenix, Arizona in April 2009, and will be looking to the future as NCECA becomes more than a conference with many events and gatherings that make up the community we call the NCECA family.

NCECA is privileged to have an incredibly gifted and active membership with a Board of Directors providing leadership in the field. As NCECA approaches the 50th anniversary year, the council is adapting its operational structure to reflect and utilize the benefit of having a full time Executive Director and staff in a national office.

I want to publicly acknowledge and commend Morgan O'Brien, Executive Director, as he completes his first six months in this position. The charge for Morgan, when he joined the NCECA family, was large and ambitious. Over the recent months, Morgan has impacted on issues of membership, governance and operating structure, as well as communications, all with the goal of making NCECA more than a conference. With a strong team of Dori Nielson, Kate Vorhaus, Helen Anderson, Marko Fields and Tom Prairie, NCECA will continue to serve you to the best of our abilities and will have value continually added as a benefit of your membership in the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts.

NCECA has undertaken an ambitious goal of updating the branding and marketing strategies as well as the communication network for the membership and the council. Morgan O'Brien and Richard Burkett, Communications Director have been spearheading this initiative. As NCECA demonstrates leadership in the education of the ceramic arts to the membership and the larger arts community, the new website and broader communication pieces will enhance our ability to realize our mission. It is anticipated that we will introduce the website in the coming months, and I hope you will provide your feedback to let us know how we may best serve your needs through the website.

Lastly, NCECA will be co-producing *Shared Journeys*, its first international symposium in October. The opportunity being made available by our partners in this initiative --West Virginia University and Jingdezhen Ceramic Institute --is one I urge you all to consider participating in. The community of ceramic artists around the world shares a common bond in celebrating human creativity and artistic expression. The benefit of international collaboration gives insight and cross-cultural understanding through the arts. NCECA is providing leadership in promoting cultural dialogue by an international membership and your contribution is valued and important!

I wish you all a healthy and productive summer and look forward to seeing you in China or next spring at the 43rd Annual Conference in Phoenix, Arizona!



Skeff Thomas

NCECA BYLAWS UPDATE

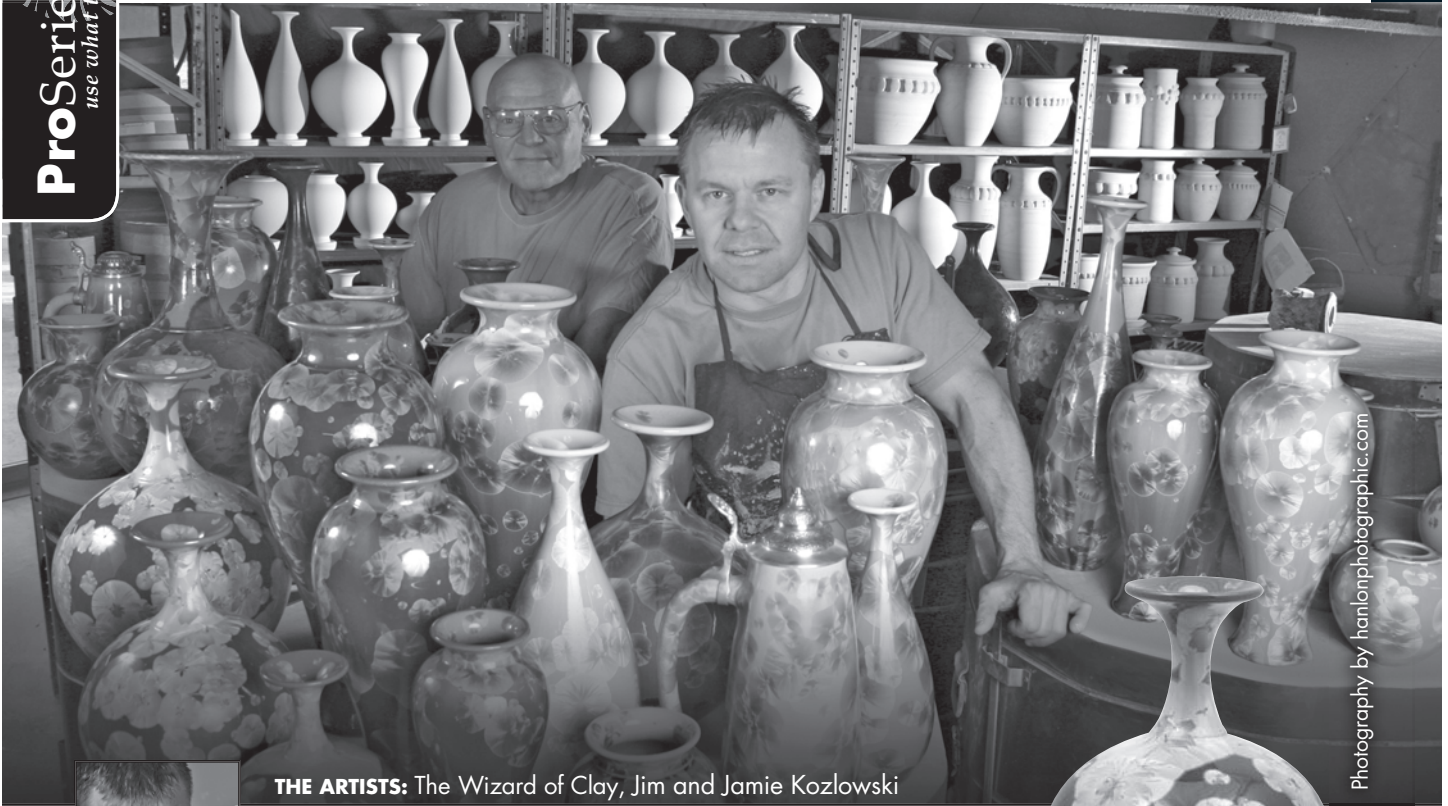
NCECA will be updating its bylaws this summer. In part, this is to modernize language with "plain English," clarify ambiguous passages and eliminate redundancies. More important, we will amend several sections to let us better serve our members. Contemplated amendments include:

- Expanding the number of Board members to better represent multiple constituencies.
- More Board positions elected, rather than appointed, to better assure member voices are heard.
- Removing some provisions that are really operating issues (such as categories of membership) to allow us to be more flexible and responsive to members.

Of course, any such changes can only be made with the approval of you, our members. We welcome your feedback, and look forward to sharing a proposed draft with you in the fall.

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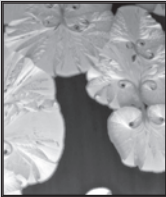


Photography by hamiltonphotographic.com



THE ARTISTS: The Wizard of Clay, Jim and Jamie Kozlowski

Jim Kozlowski started what is now The Wizard of Clay Pottery over 42 years ago. Together with his son Jamie, they have been working on perfecting Cone 10 crystalline glazes for the past 6 years. As you can see by the pictures they are experts at what they do. The Wizard of Clay supplies over 80 galleries throughout the world. They have eight Skutt kilns and fire every day to keep up with the demand.



THE TECHNIQUE: Macro Crystalline Glazing

Crystalline glazes are one of the most difficult glazes to develop. To try to develop them on a production basis is close to impossible. High zinc based glazes are used to “grow” these beautiful fan crystals on the porcelain vases. In the glaze firing the kiln is brought to Cone 10 and then precisely cooled to one or more holding temperatures which allow the crystals to develop. Everything from the glaze formulation and application to the kiln firing needs to be perfect.



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NCECA'S CERAMICS CRITICISM CHALLENGE!

We've said our piece. Now it's your turn.

For this challenge we have selected an artwork by studio ceramist, Jason Walker. We've seen his work a lot lately, whether at the Pittsburgh NCECA Conference, in shows, or in publications; perhaps you've even formed some conclusions about his work. So, here's the deal: we challenge you to write a critique - 500 words or less - of the piece shown below. Every submission will be posted, in full, on NCECA's website, and three will be chosen for publication in the Fall issue of this Newsletter. Send your critique as an attached *Word* document, by Sept. 12, to: critclay@nceca.net, or mail to: NCECA CritClay, 77 Erie Village Sq., Suite 280, Erie, CO 80516-6996.



'Timing Chain'
13"x16"x10"
Porcelain

DATES TO REMEMBER:

- 2008/2009 NCECA Member Directory
August 15 - Advertising Deadline
- 2009 NCECA Clay National Exhibition
August 30 - Submittal Deadline
Sept. 6 - Late Submittal w/ late fees
- 2009 NCECA Awards
Sept. 15 - Nominations Deadline
- 2009 NCECA Emerging Artists
Sept. 18 - Nominations Deadline
- 2009 Regional Juried Student Exhibition
October 1 - Entry Deadline
- 2010 NCECA Conference Exhibitions
October 1 - Proposals Deadline
- NCECA Fall Board Meeting
Oct. 7-11, Philadelphia, PA
- 2009 Exhibitor Spaces
October 15 - Request Forms Due
- NCECA China Symposium
Oct. 22 - Nov. 2
- 2010 Concurrent Independent Exhibitions
Early Nov. 2008 - Proposals Due
- 2009 Regina Brown Undergrad Fellowship
Nov. 14 - Nominations Deadline
- 2009 Graduate Student Fellowship
Nov. 14 - Nominations Deadline
- 2009 Topical Discussions/NCECA Connections
Early December - Proposals Due
- 2009 43rd Annual NCECA Conference
April 8-11, 2009 - Phoenix, AZ

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