

## Seaboard native, award-winning costume designer uses creativity as small town economic driver

BY BRENDA PORTER-ROCKWELL

**M**OST NOTED FOR HIS TONY-award winning costume designs, the town of Seaboard's native son, William Ivey Long, plans to bring a little touch of Broadway to Eastern North Carolina. He's committed to making the Tar Heel state the number one domestic market for the manufacture of classical- and romantic-style tutus.

### Yes, tutus.

Long left Seaboard as a teen and eventually earned a Masters of Fine Arts in set design from the Yale School of Drama (New Haven, CT). In 1998, after returning to see the 55th anniversary *The Lost Colony*, a community theatre production in nearby Manteo he and his family had worked with for decades, Long heard the siren song of Seaboard. It was time for the prodigal son to come home.

By 1998 a lot had changed in Seaboard. Similar to many small towns, jobs were gone, neighbors moved away and stores closed.

"I thought 'what can we do to help revitalize this small town?' Like thousands of little towns, [Seaboard] is in need of energy ... and action ... and imagination," said Long. "So my friends and I founded the Eastern Seaboard Trust to spur economic development and preservation of my ancestral home. I want to keep what's special in the town special, and then find new ways to invigorate it."

Backed by an arms-length of celebrities from music, fashion, film and Broadway, and North Carolina notables, the Eastern Seaboard Trust is an umbrella non-profit charged with spurring economic development in town.

"You can go to fancy cocktail parties all you want to in New York City, but we grow cotton and peanuts. I'm from Seaboard and I've been working in New York City for 35 years," quipped Long, adding that the combined experience of leaving and coming back, "Just makes it a richer pie!"

North Carolina has long been associated with manufacturing furniture — a tradition that began to fade as jobs were sent overseas. Some 20 years later, Long, who returns to his Seaboard home every summer for a "refresher," has focused the Trust's creative energy on a place he once called home.

Around 2000, talks began in earnest



William Ivey Long

about where to begin. The Trust, with the help of graduate students from N.C. Central University's Urban Planning department, and funding from the N.C. Rural Center for Economic Development in Raleigh, conducted a survey where residents determined a list of possible services that should come to town.

A doctor's office was a priority and the Sallie Ransom Jordan Memorial Health Clinic opened in downtown Seaboard in June 2005. The Trust then turned its attention to another item on the list — the abandoned Seaboard School, where Long's father attended and discovered his own creative streak. The goal was to bring the near 100-year old high school, which sits abandoned on eight acres in the center of town, back on to the tax rolls as the Seaboard School of Fashion and Costume.

With help from graduate students at N. C. State University's College of Design and College of Textiles, the Seaboard school would take Long's know-how and connections to introduce a new element of fashion and design in North Carolina.

"This was a really exciting union," Long said of sealing the collaboration five years ago. "I thought maybe it would start as a summer institute and then grow to become an extension of the College of Design's fashion and costume program," said Long, wondering aloud from his New York City studio.

For a while all seemed to be rolling

along until the school plan was stalled with the 2008 economic crisis.

"We found that no one is funding start-up education programs," said Long. However, "They will fund job creation."

With grantors centered on work-first projects, the Trust last year tweaked the school plan. The building renovation would have to wait, but they could get to work on creating an incubator for job creation, with the added benefit of giving design and textile students hands-on experience in their craft.

"Every professional institute or school has a jobs portion to it; it's part of the arc," explained Long about turning the project's trajectory upside down. "We had always planned for this, but we did turn the plan on its head."

Long continued: "After the umpteenth group, organization or person told us there is no money for start-up educational institutions, but there is for job creation and our original mandate contained a job creation component, it actually was a natural next step."

The Trust has since procured a building in the downtown commercial district for use as a new, professional costume design shop. The Trust anticipates the shop will employ eight to 10 people for the manufacture and sale of tutus, a costume Long is familiar with.

To consult on the tutu project, the Trust has turned to Holly Hynes, former head of the costume shop at the New York City Ballet. Under her direction, the Trust has designed sample tutus to begin marketing to potential customers.

To add to the unique appeal of the tutus, Long said, the Trust is collaborating with the College of Textiles and North Carolina textile companies to co-create new fabrics to manufacture classical- and romantic-style tutus.

"We hope to develop products to rival

the best fabrics currently on the market — several of which are only now available in England," said Long.

Phase one of the project will go forward as an internet and catalogue business:

[www.northcarolinatutus.org](http://www.northcarolinatutus.org). Seaboard Mayor Bobbie Moss said Long has helped position the town as an example of using creativity for economic development.

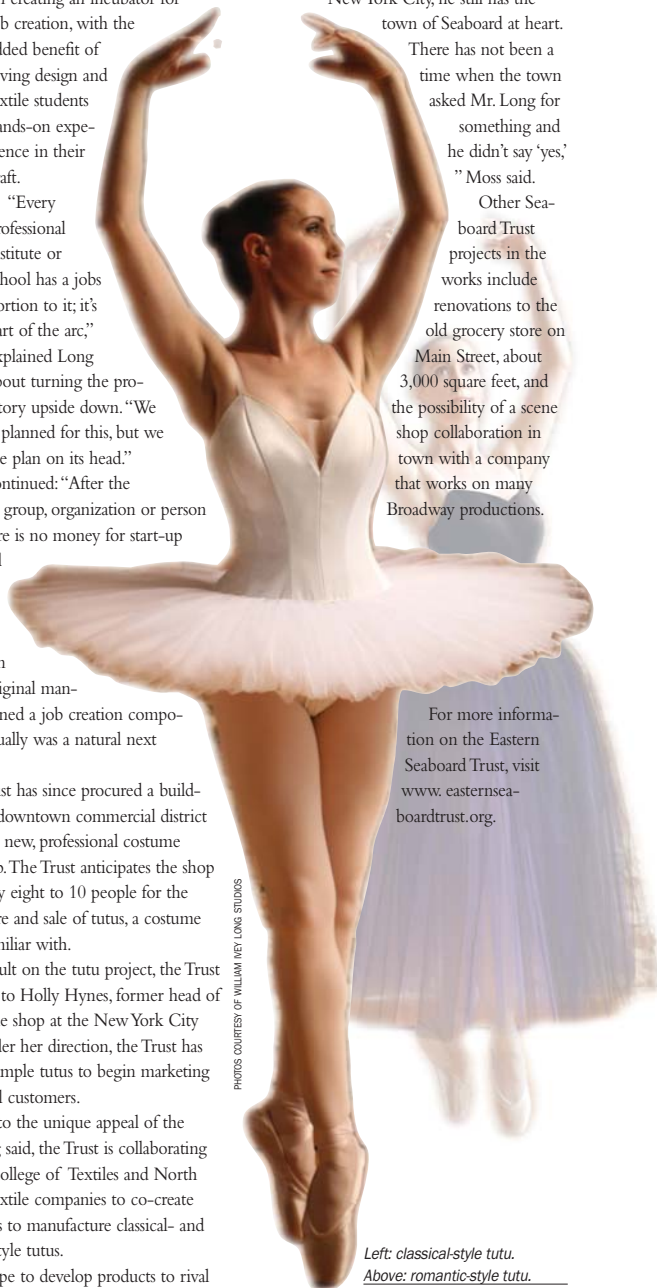
"The town of Seaboard is very lucky to have a citizen like Mr. Long. Even though he spends most of his time working in

New York City, he still has the town of Seaboard at heart.

There has not been a time when the town asked Mr. Long for something and he didn't say 'yes,'" Moss said.

Other Seaboard Trust projects in the works include renovations to the old grocery store on Main Street, about 3,000 square feet, and the possibility of a scene shop collaboration in town with a company that works on many Broadway productions.

For more information on the Eastern Seaboard Trust, visit [www.easternseaboardtrust.org](http://www.easternseaboardtrust.org).



Left: classical-style tutu.  
Above: romantic-style tutu.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF WILLIAM IVEY LONG STUDIOS