Murray Tinkelman is a remarkable man. Although it’s been more than 50 years since he began his career as an illustrator and educator, time has done nothing to diminish his energy level or enthusiasm for his work and his students. In fact, at an age when many people are thinking of slowing down, Tinkelman has taken on a brand-new responsibility—the launching of a limited-residency Master of Fine Arts in Illustration program at the University’s Hartford Art School.

“I love teaching; it’s a joy and a great challenge. It’s what makes it all worthwhile,” says Tinkelman.

Born in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn, N.Y., in 1933, Tinkelman says he was destined to become an illustrator. “I had no choice. It’s in my DNA. As a young boy, I was already fascinated by N.C. Wyeth’s color illustrations in books like Treasure Island and Kidnapped. I was a terrible student in school, but fortunately, one of my junior high school teachers convinced my parents to send me to the High School of Industrial Arts, now called the High School of Art and Design, in Manhattan.”

Tinkelman did his first illustration job for Seventeen magazine in 1951. After a two-year tour of service in the U.S. Army, he attended the Brooklyn Museum’s Art School and the Cooper Union School of Art. In 1963 he was invited to teach at the prestigious Parsons School of Design in New York City, where, within two years, he became chair of the illustration department. Fourteen years later, Syracuse University called. In 2006 Tinkelman retired from Syracuse, where he taught undergraduate students and was head of the school’s Master of Art in Illustration independent study degree program.

Today, Tinkelman remains an active illustrator, working out of the studio he maintains at his home in Cortlandt Manor, N.Y., where he lives with his wife of 50 years, Carol. She is the program administrator of the Hartford MFA program and, essentially, the artist’s right arm.

Tinkelman’s zest for the art of illustration is reflected in his relationship with both faculty and students at the University.

“Murray has a tremendous impact on our students and faculty. We realize that we have a national treasure among us,” notes Hartford Art School Dean Power Boothe. He tapped Tinkelman to devise the new MFA program some three years ago, after the artist spent a highly successful semester at the University as the 2002 recipient of the Hartford Art School’s Georgette and Richard Koopman Distinguished Chair in the Visual Arts.

The MFA program, which began this past summer with 17 students, all of whom are working illustrators, is the only one of its kind in Connecticut and one of only six in the United States.

Described as “a moveable feast” by Boothe, the program features two-week residencies at the University of Hartford and weeklong trips to several other cities, where students have the opportunity to network with the field’s top talents.

“It was a coup to get Murray,” says Boothe. “If someone is going to drive a program like this, it has to be someone with passion and energy. Students want to be a part of this program because of Murray Tinkelman…and so do teachers.”

The feeling is mutual.

“Hartford might not have invented collegiality, but they’ve perfected it. I’ve never felt such terrific support and camaraderie as I have at Hartford,” says Tinkelman.

Editor’s note: For more information on the limited-residency MFA in Illustration program, contact the Tinkelmans at 914.737.5961 or tinkelman@hartford.edu, or visit www.hartfordillustrationmfa.org.