

the Art of Glass

By Kelly Burns

If you've ever seen a glassblowing demonstration, you may recall being a little awed while watching the process. The furnace **heated to 2,350 degrees**, the glowing orb of molten glass gathering at the end of the blow pipe, its shape malleable to the artists' tools. The practiced choreography of the artists as they work seamlessly together to take the creation from a liquefied blob to **a stunning piece of glass art**.

If you've ever seen such a mesmerizing demonstration and wished you could give glassblowing a try, all you need to do is take a trip downtown. The Sanctuary Arts School and Glass Studio, located next to The Agora Borealis on Lake Street, offers "Create your Own" workshops where you can make your own glass artwork. Paperweights, bowls, Christmas ornaments, stemless wine glasses, and olive oil dispensers are just a few of the items you can make, and the process only takes about 15 minutes for each piece.

The studio's principal function, beyond introducing the medium of glasswork to the public, is to fund the Sanctuary Arts School, a nonprofit dedicated to educational and charitable outreach. For founder Eric Hess, creating a nonprofit that would be inclusive to everyone was always the goal.

"Sanctuary Arts School was established two years ago, and its primary mission is to bring the glass arts programming classes to underserved communities in Shreveport," Hess said. "The board of directors recognized that there was limited access to arts education in Caddo Parish. They felt that in a small way they could begin to fill that need that was in the community."

The outreach began with the Glass Warrior program, a way to introduce veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to the therapeutic benefits of glassblowing. "Whenever you're taking any kind of course that is physical and hands-on, your mental focus is on that," Hess said. "It's like tunnel vision. Instead of sitting with your thoughts and thinking about the things that cause the PTSD, working with the glass allows you to relax, to become focused on the glass and, to an extent, to put you in a better state of mind." One of the recent graduates of the

program found it to be so effective, he will be funding the next veteran who will take the eight-week intensive course.

The next step was to start working with children who live in affordable housing programs. "We determined there wasn't a lot of arts education for these kids," Hess said. "And a lot of people don't want to go to affordable housing communities because of their perception that there's a lot of crime. But we don't have that issue." By utilizing the community centers in these areas, the Arts School has given approximately 800 children the opportunity to learn about using glass as an art form.

As the nonprofit received more funding, they began expanding into nursing homes. Staying true to the mission of seeking the most underserved, they often select nursing homes in the poorest neighborhoods. The artists create clear glass flowers that the residents can then paint, and Hess remarked it is a joy to watch. "Probably of all our programs, the people that appreciate it the most are the elderly," he said. "I mean, their faces light up."

Sanctuary Arts School is still growing and adding programs and will soon be doing arts programming for Volunteers of America and the Louisiana Association for the Blind. The studio also rents out to groups of up to 30 people and partners with a catering service, which makes it ideal for birthday celebrations or corporate holiday parties.

"It also works out really great for date nights," Hess said. "People can go to dinner, then come and make some glass. A lot of people, even after they make their glass, they will stay and watch. It's free for people to come in anytime. Just sit, talk to us. We love talking to people about glass and giving demonstrations."



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