



ROYCROFTERS-AT-LARGE ASSOCIATION CHRONICLE

:: OUR MISSION ::

The Roycrofters-At-Large Association was formed over 30 years ago by a group of East Auroran's that included several descendants of the original Roycrofters, including Elbert Hubbard's granddaughter. The Roycrofters-At-Large Association, Inc. has been entrusted with educating, fostering and inspiring through the continual evolution of the Arts and Crafts Movement.

FALL 2016

Bringing beauty into the world, one tiny bead at a time

By Joe Kirchmyer

Roycroft Master Artisan Susan Lichtenthal has molded a nice career for herself shaping molten glass into handcrafted beads. But the path to her career as an artist took a lot of twists and turns before she finally found the perfect outlet for her bottled up creativity. Here's her story... the good, the bad and the beautiful.



So with that said, yes, I'm glad I had all my prior education and experience. As for being a Registered Nurse, I tried it. I loved going to school and furthering my education, but I really did not enjoy the work. That's what drove me to start my own business. My business experience made the transition more comfortable, and my love for creating simply comes from within.

Q: You've said that your business has evolved many times throughout the past 20 years to become what it is today. How so?

A: It sure has! I started my home-based business doing embroidery. With the help of East Aurora's own Aurora Sewing Center, I worked from home making samples and project ideas for the sewing store. The owners of Aurora Sewing

Center set me up with an embroidery machine and computer software. My job was to learn the digitizing software, sew project ideas, teach customers to use the software and teach embroidery classes. This was perfect for me as I was using my talents to create. My knowledge of computers was, of course, a plus.

I worked for several years as an independent contractor primarily from my home, which gave me the opportunity to be a stay-at-home mom and leave nursing. Within a few years I bought commercial embroidery machines and equipment and began my commercial embroidery shop business. I provided apparel to local businesses with their logos embroidered on shirts, jackets, hats and such. I owned and operated this business — Custom Creations Embroidery — for approximately 10 years. This was my way of caring for my girls and providing an income as well.

But, this became work and it was not fun any more. I had become a laborer. It started out creative, but now it was lacking imagination. I became a slave to the machines and took no pleasure in the production work.

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Q: What does the studio of a master glass artisan look like?

A: It's a mess. I wish it wasn't, but it is. I have several different work stations and I'm always running between them. I have my torch area in the garage where I make the beads, a work station in what should be a dining room, an area where I put everything together and a place where I finish. I also have a metalworking bench in the dining room where I do my metal fabricating when I incorporate metal into some of my beads. I also have my office where I handle all the clerical aspects of my business.

I don't find inspiration in cleaning up my work station. I have a sign hanging above my desk that reads, "Organized people are just too lazy to look for things." That sign makes me laugh. I really am very organized and I know where everything is at all times. I look at it as though the clutter and chaos at my work stations are just essential stacks of stuff.

Q: Where do you hope your craft takes you next?

A: I'm quite happy with where I am. Of course I want to continue to evolve and learn new techniques because continuing to grow as an artisan is very important. I feel that one never quite masters a craft as there is always something to explore and learn. However, I am very content with my business as I have it. I feel I'm very fortunate that I get to create and then meet the end user at the point of sale. I don't think I would want it any other way.

Joe Kirchmyer is president of Kirchmyer Media LLC, a communications company based in West Seneca, N.Y. You can contact him at jkirchmyer@verizon.net.

THE ROYCROFTERS-AT-LARGE 40TH ANNIVERSARY

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Board Meetings

Board meetings are regularly scheduled for the second Tuesday of the month. The first 15 minutes of the meeting is reserved for member comments, after which the board will enter a closed session. Contact the RALA Coordinator for details.

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A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Greetings,

It is an honor and a privilege to take over the helm of The Roycrofters At-Large Association, Inc. I look forward to working with our fine board and coordinator to drive our mission forward for the next year. Although I'm not an Artisan member (in fact, 2/3 of our membership are not RALA Artisans), I come to the organization from The Roycroft Chamber Music Festival, a group that's planning its 24th season for June of 2017. RCMF has consistently brought high quality, professional musicians to East Aurora for chamber music performances that have mostly been held at acoustically wonderful St. Matthias' Episcopal Church. Our musicians are a combination of locals and out of towners, and they are asked to play by long-time artistic directors Gene and Nancy Gaub. The Gaubs originally lived in East Aurora, although they have since migrated westward to Iowa. Nonetheless, they return each Spring for a diverse 2 week program. If you love chamber music, please come join us this year (June 10, 11, 18 and 19 at 7:30), and if you don't think you'll like chamber music, or don't know anything about it, we provide an affordable way to be introduced to it.

Through RCMF, I became a board member of Roycrofters At-Large Association, Inc. in 2007 and have served as its treasurer for the last 5 years. I have also worked extensively with Howard Lehning, Thomas Pafk and Ron Van Ostrand to redraft the bylaws on two separate occasions, and I've been integrally involved in our ongoing work with the Wendt Foundation on issues related to the protection of our very valuable trademark on both the state and federal levels.

I'm particularly grateful to Kitty Turgeon who inspired me to serve, and to all current and past board members with whom I've worked, including, most notably Ron Van Ostrand, who guided us through the creation of our first strategic plan, and Thomas Pafk, Al Sleeper, Jack Bartlett and Debbie Muniak who have all taught me a great deal.

Please feel free to write (martha@marthabuyer.com) or call me (716-652-4413) if you have questions or concerns. I'm very pleased about my new role, and I look forward to working with you.

- Martha Buyer, RALA President



:: SAVE THE DATE ::

ROYCROFT SUMMER FESTIVAL

June 24 & 25, 2017



Bringing beauty into the world, one tiny bead at a time ...continued from page 1

Then one day I came across the most beautiful bracelet I had ever seen! The bracelet contained glass beads that reminded me of paperweights, and I was so intrigued by their beauty. The bracelet belonged to a friend and it was purchased at a craft show somewhere in the country. I was told these beautiful beads were handmade. Wow, I thought. Could I make them? How did they do it? Where do I start?

I have always had a great appreciation for glass art and have my own collection of glass paperweights from some of the masters of the art. I didn't feel glass paperweights were in my reach to create. However, these beads possibly were. So my search for information began 15 years ago to learn how to make these tiny creations of wonder. I searched for books on the topic of glass bead making and the equipment to get started.

I was completely self taught, and it certainly took a lot of trial and error. But when I look back at the way I started — not having a teacher or instructor or someone to guide me — this has led to my beads being very distinct when compared to other glass artists. I found my own path which led to my own creations, not imitations of someone else's work.

Q: Do you really find beauty in every single glass bead — large or small — that you create?

A: That question makes me laugh! The ones I do not find beauty in go into the garbage. When my girls were young, I remember they would go through my garbage can at my work bench and search for beads I had discarded. I laugh because they obviously found beauty in the ones I didn't. That was during my early years of learning how to make beads, and there were lots of mistakes back then.

Truthfully though, yes I do. As long as I do not rush any of the process of making these beads, they all come out beautiful. One method I love to do is encasing my beads with clear crystal glass. This gives the bead depth, as in a fine glass paperweight. The crystal encasement is like a window to look through and see the beauty within. Another technique I use often is incorporating earth tones together. Through the use of these colors I can create what appears to be scenes of nature. In my beads I see stormy oceans, beautiful sunsets, setting moonscapes, desert sands, summer skies and so on.

I love listening to my customers tell me what they see in each bead. When my customers express their thoughts, they see so much more than I do ... everything from horses running, boats sailing and birds flying. So yes, every bead is beautiful and every bead speaks to someone in a different way. I feel that they capture the creative imagination in all of us.

Several months ago I had a mother come by with her two children. While the mother shopped, the kids were looking at the beads

and I was explaining to them the process of how I make them. I was telling the kids that the glass is very hot when I make the beads. Out of no where, one of the children says, "Is that why one bead says 'Hot?'" I didn't know what the child was talking about, so I said show me. The child went and pulled a bead down from the display and showed me. And sure enough, there were the letters HOT in the formation of the glass. That was an incredible moment. Someone else seeing something in the glass that I had no idea was there. Of course I pulled that bead and will never sell it now.

Q: You're a self-taught artist, and learning to melt glass sounds like it might be painful. Can you relate?



A: Oh yes, I can relate! Working with molten glass was definitely a learning experience. I won't lie, I have burned myself several times, one time really bad ... so bad an area of my skin was black. I won't forget the smell of burning skin. However, there was no pain because I also burned the nerve endings. That was in the early years, and the brain learns quickly not to touch the hot glass.



I heat the glass in the torch to about 1,800 degrees. At that point the glass is flowing nicely so I can create with it. When I introduce a new rod of glass to the flame, I must go very slow heating it. The end of the glass rods will often burst in the flame when first exposed to the torch, so I get hit all the time with very sharp and very hot pieces of glass flying at a very high speed. To avoid

these continuous burns I cover my skin with clothing and wear an apron to protect my lap.

Q: Where do you draw your inspiration from?

A: I draw my inspiration from everything around me. I love nature and the outdoors, and maybe that's why my beads resemble nature scenes.

I also draw my inspiration from my customers by listening to what they like. I listen to what they describe when they are looking at my work and I observe what is popular at any given time. I follow color trends with each season. Overall, I try to create what I like and I can only hope my customers will like the same thing.

This may sound strange, but I do not take special orders or requests. I need to make a bead the way I want to make it. My inspiration only comes from within. The glass only flows for me when I am in my own zone. I don't like creating what I think someone is describing to me. Customers must pick from what I have made so I offer a lot of options and my work is continuously changing. My hope is that customers are excited to come and see what is new.

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