

ART IN THE SCHOOLS — THANKS MISS BEA!

Astoria Visual Arts, Astoria High School and Knappa High School have partnered to increase students' skills in the visual arts

By CATE GABLE

The Gift of Art

As painter and miniaturist Noel Thomas says, "I think we've done a disservice to our children. When the budget needs to be cut, art and music are the first things to go."

But this year, Noel and his wife, poet Patricia Staton Thomas, are part of a group supporting a community arts project that delivers the gift of art to Astoria and Knappa high school students.

The seed of this gift for the ages all started back when Noel was in school. "I had an eighth grade art teacher, Miss Bea Johnson, an itty bitty feisty thing, full of energy," Noel says. "And on my last day of school in Longview, she came up to me and said, 'When you're through with high school and girls and cars and all of that and you start settling down, I want you to go to the Los Angeles Art Center.' I didn't know it at the time, but I really filed that idea away."

In fact, both Noel and Pat have pursued lives with art at the center. As Noel tells the story, "At a really depressed moment, lying in my bunk in Germany in the Army, I started thinking, what do I really want to do? And Miss Johnson's voice came back to me out of the gloom — 'go to the Los Angeles Art Center' — and that's just what I did. And I've been in art ever since."

"I did go to the LA art center," he says. "Then I went into advertising to pay off my debts, but one day here about 30 years ago I said to Patty, 'If I'm ever going to do this, I better get at it.' We cut back on our other work and started doing what we wanted to do."

Pat decided she wanted to pursue poetry, and Noel began



PHOTO BY DANNY MILLER

Greer Sund, a senior at Gray Alternative High School, works on a glass creation at Fernhill Glass Studio during a Community-based Arts Programming for Teens art workshop in late October.

painting. Five years ago they started the Miss Bea Johnson Fund for Young Artists from their art show proceeds.

So, with seed money from the Miss Bea fund, a generous grant from the Oregon Community Foundation, and the support of the Astoria Visual Arts board and members, the Community-based Arts Programming for Teens began.

"The program is coordinated by artist and educator Miki'ala Souza, who is working with Astoria High School art teacher Mickey Cereghino and Knappa High School art teacher Janet Sheridan to expand the art opportunities for students,"

writes AVA board vice president Lisa Smith. "Our goal is to give our local students increased exposure to the visual arts, both in the classroom and with outings and excursions to museums, galleries and artists' studios."

Art in the Real World

Program coordinator Miki Souza has a Bachelor of Fine Arts in painting from the University of Oregon, and an Master of Arts in education from Western Oregon University. She knows the importance of both receiving arts education and seeing art first hand.

"I've been hearing such great feedback from teachers and parents

'THEY GET TO GO SEE WHERE OTHER ARTISTS WORK, THEY GET TO THINK OFF THE PAGE, OUTSIDE OF THE BOX. THAT'S HUGE!'



PHOTO BY DANNY MILLER

Claude Kurtz, owner of Fernhill Glass Studio in Astoria, spreads green colored glass on a table to add to a creation while helping high school students during an art workshop.

For more information about the Oregon Community Foundation: www.oregoncf.org

of the students about how they'll come home at the end of the day, after one of our classes or outings, and start talking about how amazing the day was," Miki says.

She was thrilled in late October to be able to take 21 students from Knappa High School, Astoria High School and Gray Alternative High School to visit Fernhill Glass Studio in Astoria for quarterly art workshops up close and personal.

"At Fernhill our students got to blow glass, handle liquid glass, choose colors and be up near the furnaces," Miki says. "They each got to make a piece of art to take home, and they were so proud of what they made. It was great! A lot of these students are probably going to continue to make art after school. And it's just this kind of opportunity to do something that's a little more in depth, outside of the norm, that inspires them."

On Dec. 2, Gray School stu-

dents visited Clatsop Community College's art department on a field trip to learn about printmaking. Future printmaking workshops are planned at the college's art department for more of the high school art students taking part in the program.

Coming up in 2017

"They get to go see where other artists work, they get to think off the page, outside of the box. That's huge!" Miki says. "Next year, we may get to go to Seattle for an overnight to some galleries and museums. We'll probably go on the train — that in itself will be new for many of our students. Some of them may have gone to Portland, but going to Seattle — a little bigger city — that will be exciting."

Other aspects of the program

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