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he works almost full time at the gallery. Ocean Beaches location, which is a larger gallery directly in front of their first studio, in 2007. Meyer officially resigned as pharmacy manager in 2008.

“It wasn’t really a retirement thing, it was more that, once I started doing this and I knew how much I enjoyed it, it would be preferable to me,” Meyer said. Now, his work can be found in galleries up and down the Oregon coast, including here in Florence at The River Gallery.

After a full career in healthcare, Meyer found a new passion and successfully pursued it. He spends his days now creating unique pieces such as lamp shades, decorative glass bulbs, vases and really anything he can imagine.

“It’s one of those things that, medicine and being a pharmacist, you work with your brains more than your hands,” Meyer said. “With glass, I was able to sit back and look at what I’ve made. You don’t get that same feedback out of really anything in healthcare. It was a nice change for me.”

The history of glass blowing dates back about 2,000 years ago, when the Phoenicians set up the birthplace of glassblowing in what is now Lebanon and Israel, as well as Cyprus. Glass bottles and tubes have been excavated from Jerusalem dating back to 37 B.C., placing large historical and archeological significance on glassblowing. The spread of the Roman Empire also helped spread glassblowing as it was greatly supported by the Roman government, with commercial glass blowing really beginning during the reign of Augustus, from 27 B.C. to his death in 14 A.D., according to the American Journal of Archaeology.

Glassblowing essentially explores the ability of glass to be inflated to create bulbs and rounded shapes. Molten glass is wrapped around the end of a

blowpipe, a hollow metal rod. The glass blower then blows into the blowpipe, inflating the glass like a balloon, but at a much slower rate. From here, the glassblower can work the glass into any desired shape, from bowls to balls to vases.

Meyer said there have been some modern changes in glassblowing, such as the formulas for colored glass. The biggest changes, he said, have been in heating technology, such as newer electric furnaces as opposed to gas furnaces. Overall, however, he said “the whole basis for glassblowing really is pretty much the same.”

The technique of heating, blowing and shaping the glass has remained the same since it was created 2,000 years ago.

For Meyer’s workshop, clear glass from Germany is kept melted in a ceramic bowl at a continuous 2,050 degrees inside a large, matte-grey electric furnace. Meyer uses what’s called a punty, which is a metal rod, to dip into the bowl of clear glass inside the furnace. Once the clear glass is on the punty, he takes it out of the furnace so the glass cools a little and doesn’t melt off.

In order to add color, he dips the clear glass blob into what’s called frit, which is crushed colored glass pieces — think large sprinkles but made of glass. Each color sticks to the clear glass and Meyer dips the clear glass blob into a different color on each side.

Next he sets the punty with the colored/clear glass blob into a smaller furnace, called a glory hole, that looks like a large cylinder turned on its side with a hole on the front, where the blowpipe and punty can fit through. Similar to temperatures the electric furnace reaches, the glory hole essentially reheats the glass, as it’s kept at 2,300-2,400 degrees. This type of furnace became widely used in the U.S. when studio glass blowing became popular in the 1960s. The name refers to a term used by gold miners who referred to veins of gold as “glory holes.”



Bob Meyer blows glass at his studio, Ocean Beaches Glassblowing in Seal Rock.

VICTORIA SANCHEZ/SIUSLAW NEWS

There are doors at the end of the glory hole that can open to make more space for larger projects to fit inside. Meyer lets the colored glass soften into the clear glass inside this smaller furnace while he retrieves the blowpipe. He then removes the punty from the glory hole and allows the colored glass to drip onto the blowpipe, which he then twirls, spiraling the colored glass onto the blowpipe.

“This allows the colors to flow in and out of each other,” Meyer said. Now the project is ready to be blown.

Meyer works through a repetitive series of putting the blowpipe into the smaller furnace where the glass warms up, removing the blowpipe and rolling the glass at the end on a metal table to form its shape, then returning it to the smaller furnace to warm the glass up again. Once it starts taking shape, he blows into the blowpipe, creating a balloon shape at the bottom, and this allows him to craft whatever shaped object he is looking for.

“You know some glass

indicative of the Oregon coast are actually modeled after the floats that fishermen would use for their fishing nets. Meyer says Japanese fishermen specifically would use glass for their floats back in the late 1800s because glass doesn’t get waterlogged like wood. Eventually plastic came to replace the glass floats.

“A lot of the floats would break loose from the fishermen’s nets. There’s this current that circles the Pacific Ocean so some floats are still travelling in that current from Japan. Occasionally a few get spit out and they wash up on our beaches,” Meyer said. “Back in the ‘60s it was really common to find floats on the beach.”

He added that’s why a lot of these glass floats are sold in galleries along the beach.

“The floats are interesting to me. You can see that the shapes are the same and everything, but the way these are different is that each one is a different canvas that you can do whatever you want on,” Meyer said. “As far as the colors, there’s a movement of the colors. You can add texture to them. You can do all sorts of things. Within those confines of a six-inch sphere, you can really do a lot of creative things.”

Once the piece is complete in shape, Meyer carefully creates a break at the top of the piece where it’s attached to the blowpipe, removes the piece and places it into an annealer — which looks like a large, silver freezer one might keep in the garage, except it keeps the finished glass pieces warm. If the glass cools too fast, it will crack.

“There’s a lot of stress in the glass because it’s been reorganized and everything. From the range of 940 degrees to about 700 degrees F, the annealer is relieving all those stresses in there,” Meyer said. “So if you don’t give the glass enough time with that annealing, it might make it all the way to room temperature without cracking, but it might

crack the next day or the next year. Some people have even had them crack 10 years later just from poor annealing.”

The pieces spend about six hours between this 940- to 700-degree range, and then the annealer turns off so the glass continues to cool at a faster rate.

According to Meyer, some of the favorite pieces he’s made have been ones that have surprised him. When making a vase, glassblowers swing the piece while it’s attached to the blowpipe so it stretches, creating the neck of the vase. “With this one piece, it just kept stretching. Even after I stopped swinging,” Meyer said, and the final piece was a round, cream bulb with a neck standing about four feet tall, evocative of a green onion but with cream stalks instead of green. It’s now displayed in the left entryway window of the gallery.

Meyer says he’s practiced enough with glassblowing now that he gets more burns from his oven at home than from glassblowing, and that with every piece, he continues to learn.

“Glassblowers can get just about done and all of a sudden it can shatter or you drop the piece on the floor, and that happens a fair amount. I think if you get frustrated, it’s the kind of thing that weeds a lot of people out early on. It’s kind of like quarterbacks and football. If they throw a few bad passes and they get down about it, they’re never going to make it,” Meyer said. “Same thing here. I convinced myself early on that if I messed up a piece, as long as there was something I could learn from it, then it was worthwhile, and that’s invariably been the case.”

Ocean Beaches Glassblowing is located at 11175 NW Pacific Coast Highway in Seal Rock. More information about the gallery can be found at www.oceanbeachesglass.com. Meyer’s work can be found locally at The River Gallery, 1335 Bay St. in Historic Old Town Florence.

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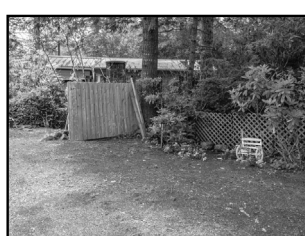
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