

# The Virginian-Pilot

PilotOnline.com

## Glass Wheel Studio has spun once around the globe in Norfolk's Neon District

November 18, 2016

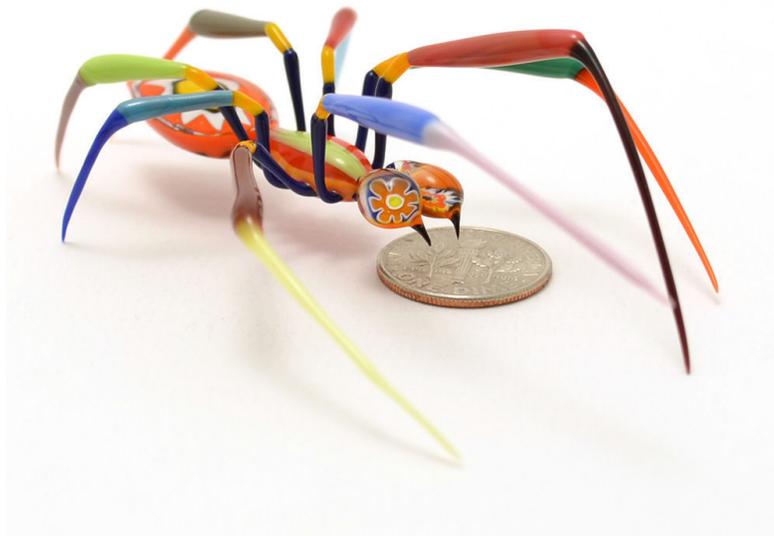
Dan Duke

Dan Duke is the entertainment editor at The Virginian-Pilot.



Stephen M. Katz

Glass Wheel Studio director Cheryl White talks about the studio spaces the facility has for local artists Thursday, November 12, 2015. Stephen M. Katz | The Virginian-Pilot



Courtesy of Glass Wheel Studio  
Featured consignment artist, Wesley Fleming. Patchwork Murrini Spider, 2015 Hot-sculpted and flame-worked.



Courtesy Glass Wheel Studio  
Jennifer Sleeper, Excitable Cells No.1;



Stephen M. Katz | The Virginian-Pilot  
Glass Wheel Studio in Norfolk



Stephen M. Katz  
The Glass Wheel Studio's atrium features a commissioned piece by local artist Robin Rogers titled "Progression." As seen Thursday, November 12, 2015. Stephen M. Katz | The Virginian-Pilot

Happy birthday, Glass Wheel Studio! The little gem on West Olney Road was buzzing this week as its first birthday party approached. The director of this contemporary art space in the heart of Norfolk's NEON arts district, Cheryl White, was both hustling through a million chores and walking on air. Saturday's exhibition opening-slash-party features new

pieces by the 13 artists who have been working in the Glass Wheel's studios for the past year, plus many new pieces coming in on consignment.

White and her gallery assistant and ninja, Alyssa Strackbein, were working out the installation of pieces that range in size from a 20-foot-long neon cityscape to little glass bugs. (No range can be given on the ingenuity and beauty.)

White paused to talk about the past year, smiling all the while. "I love it here. I mean, who gets to do this in their hometown?" The Hampton Roads native got her bachelor's and master's degrees at Old Dominion University and worked in the region, leaving the Chrysler Museum of Art to lead the Glass Wheel Studio.

"I swore I was going to be one of the brain-drain kids, leaving town," she said, but instead is working to prevent that dreaded brain drain.

"Attendance has been great right out of the gate," she said, adding that one of the most gratifying things about running Glass Wheel is seeing the hunger for contemporary art. For the NEON Festival, about 1,300 people visited the studio. And the enthusiasm of some visitors even matched White's – which is saying something.

"Someone said to me, 'I don't even feel like I'm in Norfolk.'" Walking tours from the Chrysler Museum are common, and might have up to 20 people, but during the festival White saw 70 people strolling in one tour from the Chrysler. "And I was like, hmmm ... we're going to have to do this in waves!" Glass Wheel Studio is in a 1919 building on a flood-prone street, so, White said: "I know a lot more about floodgates than I ever thought I would."

Another challenge, she said, has been educating people

“that you can buy art here. People think they have to go out of town.”

Glass Wheel’s partners have been a key to its success, she said, mentioning the Virginia Zoo (“I had a sloth in my atrium!”), the Governor’s School for the Arts, the Chrysler and its “hot shop,” or Glass Studio, and the Downtown Norfolk Council and NEON District.

“The only way we’re going to succeed is if the NEON does,” White said.

If energy, enthusiasm, creativity and quality count, and they do, the Glass Wheel will do its part.