



Today's Sunbeam

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SCC's glass center opens

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By Randall Clark

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ALLOWAY TWP. - While it attracts students from around the country, Friday's dedication of the Samuel H. Jones Glass Education Center was a day for those closest to this innovative project, coined "gas to glass."

In a fitting township - once home of the Wistarburgh Glass Works, the American Colonies first successful glass factory - Salem Community College and the benefactors and organizers who made the center a reality welcomed the East Coast's second-ever facility to use landfill gas produced by decaying trash to power glass production.

About 100 distinguished guests sat in the warmth of the nearby glass-forming kilns as students put shape to their art here on Welchville Road, while across the room blowtorches molded scientific tubing.

The studio and lab itself is like a wide-open warehouse with a gray, industrial feel to it. From it springs some of the most dazzling and colorful works of imagination.

"As I walked in this facility today I could just feel the electricity and excitement," said Freeholder Director Lee Ware. "I whole-heartedly agree, this was a sexy idea."

As his first duty as emcee, SCC President Dr. Pete Contini paid homage to the creative partnership of the college, Salem County Improvement Authority (under the leadership of the now-defunct Salem County Utilities Authority) and Energenic/DCO Energy.

"Quite a unique and certainly very meaningful collaboration of partnership was born out of this," Contini said. "(This) has far reaching expectations and certainly delivery. But it's happening, and it's happening right here in Salem County."

Partially run on green energy, equipment within the 10,000 square-foot studio will use methane gas harvested from the county landfill directly across McKillip Road as its source of power.

"This is a stellar example of a private and public partnership," said Energenic Managing Director Fred J. Eckert. "(SCC) will lower its operating costs by receiving the methane ... Salem County Improvement Authority will see a savings of \$70,000 a year."

The center bears the name of entrepreneur and SCC Foundation President Samuel H. Jones, whose \$532,000 gift enabled SCC to install the most modern equipment.

Jones recognized former SCUA head Mike Chapman for coming up with the idea, and also the numerous people who helped see it through to fruition.

"Without everybody's help, it wouldn't happen," Jones said.

The studio and lab within has been named in honor of world-renowned glass artist and college alumnus, Paul J. Stankard.

"Being associated with Salem Community College is a privilege," Stankard said. "And this high honor touches my heart and soul."

Considered a pioneer in the studio glass movement, Stankard's work is represented in more than 40 museums worldwide. In 2001, he established the International Flameworking Conference at the school.

Fifty years ago the college broke new ground by offering the first post-secondary training program for scientific glassblowers. Today, the program remains the only one in North America offering an associate's degree in scientific glass technology.

The college also offers associate's degrees in fine art through its glass art program and its glass industrial design program.

Second-year student Katie Severance, of Mt. Ephraim, said the job prospects and artistic possibilities were a big draw, especially considering the overwhelming loans involved with her first career choice as a dermatologist.

"I wanted to find a career that would help me pay as I go," Severance said. "I'm guaranteed a job coming out of it because of the demand for scientific glass blowers."

For Francis Straughn, a first-year student from Pennsville, glass working is a labor of love.

"I was checking out schools and colleges, I wanted to go for the arts," Straughn said. "I love hands-on work so I decided to do this. I just jumped into it and I started loving it."

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