

## LOCAL FAVORITES | Insider tips on exploring our area

# Kids can make blown-glass art at Banana Factory

By Kathy Lauer-Williams  
Of the Morning Call

It's a little nerve-wracking watching your 6-year-old son blow into molten glass, a few feet away from a 2,100-degree furnace. I wondered if I was crazy signing up my little boy for a "Make Your Own" workshop at Banana Factory's hot glass studio, but the brochure said it was for ages 6 and older.

Whenever we go to First Fridays at Banana Factory, Rhys always has to check out the glass-making demonstrations, and he was eager to try making glass himself.

So last weekend, there he was standing in the glass studio wearing a pair of safety glasses and a T-shirt warmed by the heat generated by the multiple kilns.

Instructor Beth Ann Ballek directed him to stand on an X on the ground as she explained the process of making a simple blown-glass ornament.

With Ballek by his side, Rhys used the pipe to take a glowing orange blob of glass out of the furnace and roll it

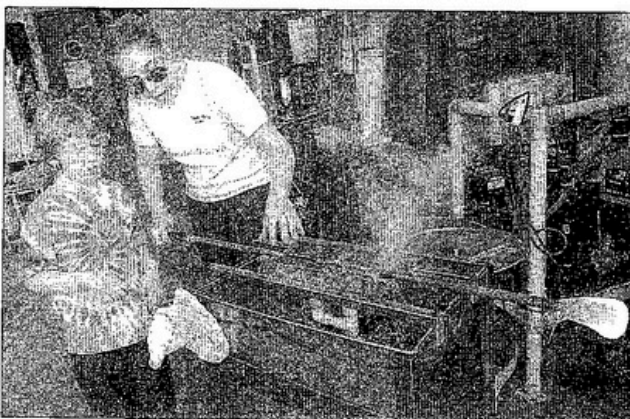
in his choices of colored glass crystals — yellow, blue and multicolored "party mix." For his design he picked a round ornament with candy cane stripes. Children can choose from striped, marbled or dotted designs; and round or tear-drop shapes.

After heating all the colors, Ballek inserted a starter bubble in the glass. Then, the rest was up to Rhys, who concentrated as he blew through the pipe while Ballek rolled it and the ornament began to take shape.

She says she starts the bubble because there is only a 30-40 second window before the glass gets too cool to manipulate, and it takes a great deal of pressure to get a bubble started.

Rhys' face broke into a wide grin as he surveyed the colorful round glass ornament he just had blown from the lump of hot glass.

Ballek then tapped the pipe to break off the blown ornament and added a hand-made glass loop. In less than a half hour, a proud Rhys had an ornament in the shape, color and design of



Harry Fisher The Morning Call

**RHYS WILLIAMS, 6**, of Emmaus, watches as glass technician Beth Ann Ballek cools off a pipe before re-inserting into the furnace, as the pair make an ornament at the Banana Factory.

his choosing. After curing for three days, the finished product can be taken home.

"After it cools down, it will have really nice bright colors," Ballek told him.

Ballek, who has been making glass for nine years, says the workshops started two years ago and have been growing in popularity.

"We did it occasionally at first," she says. "But we've had a lot of interest so we started doing it regularly on the second weekend of the

month."

Ballek, who previously worked with children at Corning Museum of Glass in New York, says there is no danger because she works with the kids one on one. There are some safety precautions — eye protection and cotton clothing is required and open shoes are not allowed. Hair must be tied back, and jewelry is discouraged.

"I'm with them every step of the way," Ballek



Martha Miller The Morning Call

## MAKE YOUR OWN GLASS WORKSHOPS

**What:** Children and adults can make their own glass objects during half-hour workshops in the GlassWorks studio under the tutelage of instructor Beth Ann Ballek. Choose from a flower or paperweight for ages 14 and older or an ornament for ages 6 and older.

**When:** 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. March 14 to 15; April 25 to 26; May 9 to 10

**How much:** \$30 for flower or ornament; \$60 for paperweight

**Where:** GlassWorks studio, Banana Factory, 25 W. Third St., Bethlehem

**Tip:** No experience required. Advance reservations are requested.

**Info:** 610-332-1300 or [www.bananafactory.org](http://www.bananafactory.org).

own glass ornament to take home."

[kathy.lauer@mc.com](mailto:kathy.lauer@mc.com)  
610-778-2235