



Jack Shannon demonstrates glassblowing techniques in the basement of the chemistry building.

Snea Char

Glassblowers do custom work

by TRICIA BRUNHART
Battalion Staff

The glass shop in the basement of the Chemistry building employs expert craftsmen, but they don't make glass swans. They don't make butterflies either.

Jack Shannon, one of the glassblowers in the shop, said the only time they make trinkets is when a group of school children are given a tour of the shop.

These craftsmen make "custom-made glassware" — things that usually can't be purchased commercially.

Researchers, mostly from the University, bring in work orders for specialized lab equipment.

"There will usually be only one (piece of equipment) like it in the world, because we build what they design," Shannon said.

The craftsmen also do repair work.

Shannon, who first worked as a high school science teacher, has been at Texas A&M since 1959 and has worked as a glassblower for almost 30 years. He first learned the craft when he worked at Dow Chemical in Freeport.

Bill Flenniken, who has been at A&M for five years and Shannon's brother, Jerry, who has been here since 1961, are the other craftsmen in the glass shop.

The glass shop handles from 1,200 to 1,600 work orders a year and the amount of time spent on each one varies with the order.

"Some might take a week; others about 10 minutes," he said.

"It's a game of coordination," Shannon said of glassblowing.

Shannon has taught some classes in glassblowing which were

sponsored by the chemistry department and open to anyone.

People seem to be enthusiastic when they first start, he said. "But when it ceases being fun, it turns into work ... they have to practice on it — it's strictly coordination."

It's not something one can learn from a book, he said.

Students from other areas of the university have taken lessons from him. Shannon finds lessons better than a formal class, because students can work in their own labs and then bring their work over to be critiqued.

Boro-silica glass is used to make about 80 percent of the equipment. Before it can be worked, this glass must be heated to about 1,300 degrees centigrade. Shannon said he finds this kind of glass easiest to work with because he is used to it.

Quartz glass is also used, but it requires a higher temperature and the glare from the flame is high in ultraviolet rays which can damage the eyes. The quartz is also very expensive compared with the borosilica.

Unless a certain piece of equipment has to be made of a special material, the glass shop usually furnishes the materials.

Shannon said the equipment and materials they work with is good, but "like anything else, we could always use more."

Because of the high temperatures, the room is always fairly hot, but it's not dangerous, he said. The biggest danger glassblowers have is from the possibility of contaminated glassware that comes in for repair.

This glass is supposed to be clean, but it could have just about



Photo by Lynn Blanco

A glassblower heats the glass, preparing to make it into something.

anything in it, such as poisonous chemicals that produce vapors when heated, or chemicals in liquid form that get in the mouth.

They also have minor accidents like burning themselves, but it's no-

thing serious. Their wives do get upset, however, when they come home with holes in their clothes, he said.

The glass shop seems to be quite popular these days, and last Thurs-

day had a visit from PM Magazine in Houston. The interview was on general glassblowing, Shannon said.

What does Shannon think about all this publicity?

"Well, it's different."

KJ

Pink F
Led Z
Door
ZZ To
Weath
umbia
Steve
(Nem)
Tom
umbia
Fleety
Bros.)
Dan I
Moon
Eagle
Little
(Warr