

Guest Column: The Faces of Hospitality

Most of us who live here start as visitors but then are captivated by the Islands' magic, inspired to create an island life. This series of columns will help put faces to small businesses – restaurateurs, innkeepers, shopkeepers, artists, tour captains, and other entrepreneurs who make our communities so unique and vibrant.

Darleen Nixon has been a glass artist for 20 years in both mediums of lampwork and kiln formed glass. She has studied with some of the world's leading glass artists and is a member of the Glass Art Society. Her work is featured in galleries throughout the United States. She started her art glass business in Friday Harbor in 1998. She felt driven to create - and what a better environment than on San Juan Island!

She loves the closeness of the people - always helping - and the quiet peaceful environment. The safety and beauty of living on this island. It thrills her to show her work to visitors on the Island when her studio is open to the public, or when her booth is open at Roche Harbor from July to September. Nixon commented, "I love the visitors' inquisitive nature. How curious they are about my glass art and why I choose to live on this island."

How does tourism benefit the Islands?

Nixon says, "It gives the visitors a glimpse of a slower pace and peaceful lifestyle. It also provides great education about protecting our environment." She joined the Visitors Bureau because she's always admired the work, "not only in promoting our artistic work, but also sharing advice on protecting our environment when visiting here. The information gathered and shared with me by the Visitors Bureau helps me manage my business better."

Managing the business side of things – data, finances, etc., is Darleen's biggest challenge. As she says, "I just want to work with glass in my studio every day. Not do paperwork!" Her recommendation for other aspiring entrepreneurs is first, determine how you are going to manage seasonal income. Get a good CPA. Plan and prepare ahead, and always follow your dream.

All the glass Darleen uses in her jewelry is imported from Murano, Italy, and she's inspired every day to create with glass by the beauty that surrounds us on this Island. As she says, "I always have new ideas I want to try with glass. I've got several on the back burner and in my mind now. A new art glass necklace design - new nightlight designs - lavender in glass. The list never ends! It is energizing to try new things in glass!"