

ISGB's Omaha Fired Up Gathering Meeting In Person Once Again



by Alicia Sheerin

Photos Courtesy of ISGB

The International Society of Glass Beadmakers (ISGB) presents *The Gathering* each year to create an educational and networking experience for lampworking beadmakers of all skill levels. After hosting *The Gathering* virtually for three years, the 2023 event, *Fired Up!*, took place in person from October 26–29, in Omaha, Nebraska. The excitement of reconnecting with old friends and meeting new artists was incentive enough for many to book their flights to Omaha, but the opportunity to attend classes and workshops led by internationally renowned names including Petra Pepper and Guido Adam sealed the deal!

Topics offered included the Lumina technique, implosions, and hollow forms. There were also sessions offered on recycling bottles and using up scrap glass and twisties. Omaha was chosen to host *The Gathering* in 2023 because of its vibrant arts scene anchored by The Hot Shops Art Center, which was started in 1999 by a group of creative risk takers who were looking to work together and use the glassblowing studio more efficiently. Now with 50 studios that over 90 artists call home, The Hot Shops is the creative community's solution for accessibility and collaboration. Besides their state-of-the-art Glass Studio, there is also a Ceramic Studio, Iron Forge, and Metal Foundry. In keeping with the mission of both The Hot Shops and the ISGB to foster collaboration and community, all hands-on workshops for *Fired Up!* took place at The Hot Shops.

Bronwen Heilman,
The Gathering instructor
for Recycling Bottles
to Beautiful Beads.

An In-Person and Virtual Bead Swap

Even for members who couldn't leave their own zip codes, there were several virtual opportunities for getting fired up. The most anticipated event each year is the Bead Swap, and that was both in-person as well as virtual participation for 2023. Several classes were also offered online at isgbeducation.org

The virtual Bead Swap was designed to provide members who were not able to attend *The Gathering* in Omaha with the fun and camaraderie that is the hallmark of our Bead Swap party. Members only needed to create 10 beads to participate. This year, while some members were swapping in Omaha, other members were chatting, swapping, and socializing in a special zoom session to join the fun. Participants probably already had plenty of beads on hand that would be perfect for a swap, and the only cost to participate was postage! In the same way that *The Gathering* Bead Swap forges relationships among our members, this on-line swap can be an introduction to new friendships throughout the ISGB.

A Marvelous Assortment of Events

Some of the events at *The Gathering* in Omaha included:

- Stretch Yourself, Stepping Outside Your Comfort Zone, an exhibition of wearable or small sculptural work with lampworked glass as a primary material,
- The Glass Bead & Jewelry Bazaar, which was open to the public on Saturday, October 28, with a unique opportunity to shop with many of the best artists in the lampworking field,
- An opportunity to visit and shop with ISGB's commercial and technical vendors that provided a hands-on experience where attendees could see, touch, and get serious about tools, glass, and information, and
- Tours offered to attendees by The Hot Shops Art Center to hear the rich history of the center. Over 90 artists now work in this collaborative space with four anchor studios that make up the heart of the center. This is the area where pottery is fired at 2,300°F, glass is blown, bronze is cast at 2,100°F, and iron is forged at 1,900°F, thus the name, The Hot Shops. In the 50 other studios of this living museum, visitors also encountered artists using a variety of mediums including oil, pastel, photography, jewelry, fiber, quilting, and more.

Additional Opportunities

The Gathering also provided the chance for conference attendees to make their own glass. Members were able to leave their torches behind and feel a new kind of heat with a glassblowing experience. A variety of options, such as paperweights, ornaments, flowers, and more, were available.

In order to best serve the needs of its members, the ISGB board also formed a subcommittee to help reimagine *The Gathering*. A survey was taken among attendees as well as those who were not participating before this year's event in Omaha. The committee is very interested in hearing from members about any and all of their thoughts on *The Gathering* as it continues working to make this annual event a truly remarkable experience for glass beadmakers everywhere. Stay tuned for news about plans for *The Gathering 2024!*

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Visit www.isgbgathering.org for more details on *The Gathering* events from 2023. Also visit www.ISGB.org to learn more about ISGB plus its educational opportunities, upcoming events, and how to become a member.

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*Kit Paulson, keynote speaker,
and Moth Mouth.*

*Carol Ann Savage,
Commemorative
Beads artist.*

