

Bead artists' cooperative opens in South Beach

By Laura Eberly Of the News-Times- Newport, Oregon



Lisa Brown has opened Water of Life ~ Native Creations bead artists' cooperative at Aquarium Village in South Beach. The co-op store offers a large selection of beads and beading tools, an eclectic library, and helpful beading advice from Brown and other co-op members. (Photo by Laura Eberly)

Lisa Brown has an extensive résumé including positions with the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians as a business counselor, a mediator for the Siletz Tribal Court, and a certified addiction counselor and drug abuse prevention specialist.

She has also created bead art for nearly two decades and shows and sells her work at tribal pow wows throughout the Pacific Northwest. In a move to combine her business know-how, artistic passion, and ability to facilitate harmony amongst differing peoples, Brown recently opened Water of Life ~ Native Creations artists' cooperative at Aquarium Village in South Beach.

"The concept for this endeavor is one of bringing together and recognizing our gifts and the similarities of artists and their ethnic cultural values," Brown said. "We call it a 'working shop' because we're here to teach people how to work with the products" - not just to sell beading supplies.

"The shop is intended as a warm and welcoming place for native and non-native peoples alike to share knowledge through beading, teaching and conversation," said Brown. She emphasized the teaching nature of the business, designed as a "working gallery. Patterns (of beadwork on display) are copyable, that's really unique about our shop. If you've ever been on the receiving end of that (generosity), it's a good thing," she said. "We build bridges between people."

The shop carries a full line of beads, produced locally and imported from as far as Africa, and beading tools and equipment as well as a selection of unique, member-created jewelry, hair accessories, and other beaded items. Beaders, whether co-op members or not, are encouraged to bring creations-in-progress to the store to receive technical assistance should they need help completing a piece.

Anyone is welcome to join the co-op. The annual membership fee of \$20 includes mention of the artist's name on the co-op business card and on the website, as well as assistance putting together an artist's statement to accompany member artwork. Members receive a significant discount on beads and supplies purchased at the shop,

anywhere from 20 to 30 percent, and are asked to volunteer two days a month helping out at the store - but such involvement is not required: those who do volunteer to cooperatively run the store receive a larger discount.

Throughout the year, Brown and fellow co-op members travel to Northwest artisan shows and pow wows offering their creations for sale. Co-op members unable to travel to the various events may send their work with Brown who exhibits and sells the items for them, retaining a commission of 15 to 20 percent for the service, a fee that varies depending upon how often the member is able to volunteer at the store; members able to travel with Brown may sell their creations at the Water of Life booth without paying a commission. Co-op members may also choose to display their artwork for sale at the shop for the same consignment fee.

Water of Life houses an eclectic library available to members and visitors and includes books on a range of subjects - complete with "a naughty book for the men," Brown said with a sly smile, producing "The Ashley Book of Knots," a classic tome on knot-tying. The library also includes esoteric-minded materials - such as information on crystals and horoscopes - and more serious fare regarding addiction and substance abuse recovery along with "Green Eggs and Ham," the perennial Dr. Seuss favorite, and cultural books on creating tribal regalia.

"Plus we have lots of beading books," Brown added.

Spirited creations

As a member of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, Brown actively perpetuates teachings from her tribal heritage, which includes ancestors of the Tututni, Macanotin, Shasta, Pit River, Modoc, and Hoopa tribal groups of Southern Oregon and Northern California. She creates her art - and her business - to honor her ancestors and nadosh, the feather dance, she said. Brown emphasizes the importance of wearing or prominently displaying beaded creations, rather than keeping them tucked away, "so that it will be able to dance and sing."

"They say our elders teach us that a part of your spirit goes into what you make, so when you make something you should be in a good way," she added.

Brown likens beading to the quilting circles of early pioneer settlers - a tradition that continues today - and noted the comforting environment such activity fosters. "They would sit around and talk about things, we use beading that way," she said.

During the course of her many years as a beader and throughout her professional experience as a substance abuse prevention counselor for the Siletz Tribe, Brown has come to believe in the power of "bead therapy," the process of working through one's life challenges through the creation of bead art, which "can be therapeutic for someone going through a bad experience," she commented.

Brown credits the origin of the technique to her mentor and local beading legend Jeanne Boardman Bard of Original Bard Beads, a bead shop and museum originally located in uptown Newport and later a longtime staple of the Nye Beach community. Brown first met Bard in the late 1980s while taking classes at Oregon Coast Community College in uptown Newport; she would help out at Bard's shop before and after classes, and she believes the important lessons she learned there about beading and life have helped guide her in her current endeavor.

Reaching out

Through her experience with the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, Brown has been able to connect members of the co-op who are descendents of native peoples with Chinook Winds Casino Resort in Lincoln City, which purchases artwork to showcase at the casino and distribute as prizes to members of the casino's Winner's Circle club, "further supporting native traditions," Brown noted.

"Dawn Courtney, marketing manager for Chinook Winds, was very gracious in her efforts to be inclusive of the artists co-op," said Brown. The casino's support has generated piecework for tribal co-op members and "created a source of revenue and an opportunity for members to receive a return for their artistic endeavors." Another benefit of the partnership, Brown noted, is the opportunity to "portray to patrons of the casino in person the essence of our tribal culture and traditions."

Water of Life Native Creations artists will offer their works for sale at the annual Run for the Wind Motorcycle Rally set for Aug. 25-27 at Chinook Winds Casino Resort. Co-op members will also staff booths at upcoming Siletz pow-wows, including the Nesika Illahee Pow Wow set for Aug. 11-13 and the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians Restoration Pow Wow set for Nov. 18 - as well as numerous pow wows outside Lincoln County.

Water of Life ~ Native Creations artists' cooperative is located in space 228 at Aquarium Village in South Beach and may be reached by contacting Brown at (541) 351-0003 or nadosh2@yahoo.com. Brown is available to instruct a range of beading classes by appointment. More information is available at AllNativeCreations.com.

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