



Blue Eyes Purse
Georgia Sullivan

South Jersey Bead Society

You may remember we briefly checked in with the South Jersey Bead Society in our July 2020 issue, but we were so intrigued by this most unique of beading groups, we had to go back and give them the full 'Focus on Groups' treatment. Located in southern New Jersey, USA, the SJBS officially came into being over twenty years ago. With current membership just shy of a hundred, they draw their members mostly from the tri-state area of New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware. SJBS place a real emphasis on beading at all skill levels; there is always something new to learn and always someone willing to teach you.

Managing such a large group falls to a dedicated team of board members, who keep things ticking over. From their top-notch social media expert who keeps everyone connected online, to their superlative treasurer who ensures there's always enough in the kitty to fund their many projects - this is a talented bunch.



Lissa Atkins, an eighteen-year veteran of the group, says "I can't say enough about the ladies who organize our monthly programs; bring in the instructors; teach classes themselves; find places for us to meet, organize our retreat, oversee

our website; write the monthly newsletter; pay our bills; maintain the membership list; and more."

SJBS have many strings to their collective bow; they run a first-class workshop programme expanding their members' horizons beyond just bead weaving to include bead embroidery, bead crochet, polymer clay, felting, wirework and more, all at a rate subsidised by the group. They offer a lending library of almost 300 books to members as a fantastic resource to those wanting to hone their skills. SJBS run their own yearly bead retreat with international tutors (this year is Bead Embroidery with Betty Stephan) to complement their usual programme of guest designer events. The group even rolls the local beading economy into their membership as vendor members, who support the group with their member's fees, while the members get to learn about local bead stores and designers. There's the SJBS' Holiday Party at which they do an earring exchange, which sounds like the best Secret Santa idea we've ever heard. Finally, they also have a long-time community outreach programme beading with Ronald McDonald House children. For those outside the US, Ronald McDonald Houses provide low-cost housing, food and services for sick children and their caregivers while they receive medical treatment.

Cherie Stovall has been with SJBS since 2012 and loves the social side of things, "I enjoy opportunities to spend time with other members. Many of us see one another outside of the formal meetings. We take road trips together and meet at homes or stores to bead. SJBS has been elevated to family status. We could have just prayed for better times and lost contact with one another. Instead, we continued with Zoom meetings. I am proud of our

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leadership team. Our bond was reinforced, when it could have been dissolved. I am deeply grateful!"

When their in-person gatherings stopped in March 2020, they quickly started a new series of meetings via Zoom, open to members and non-members alike. They wanted to keep their members together and provide a place where new members could find a little company during these trying times. They had talks from experienced members, Show and Tell to share their beadwork and of course, the general beady banter about who found what patterns where and what new beads people had got their hands on.

As with most of us, SJBS has had to confront the pandemic head on. Kathy Keefe says, "Because I'm disabled and at high risk from Covid-19 due to various medical issues, my doctors haven't wanted me to go anywhere, even masked, during the past year. SJBS has basically been my only connection to the outside world during this pandemic. Thank heaven for SJBS's Zoom meetings and classes! Even though we're not in the same room with Zoom meetings, we get to see a little of other members' homes. I especially like catching glimpses of other members' pets!"

Denise Slass-Lipson, who had only been beading two months before joining in 2013, says, "The best part of the SJBS is the selflessness of its members. You can be at any stage in your beading adventure and fit right in. The SJBS has been my lifeline. In nice weather, I've sat outside, socially distanced from other members to bead. We have shared our beading over Facebook, called each other, and placed bead orders together. Lissa posts daily on Facebook the most interesting bead and/or design articles she can find. It's awesome and makes my day most days."

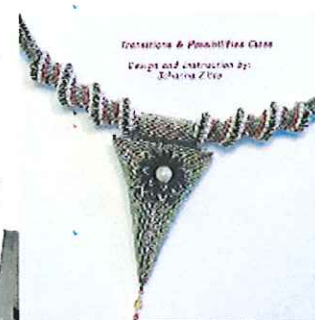
One of the most staggering things about SJBS is how productive they are as a group. Whether working solo, under a tutor's instruction or as part of



one of their round-robin projects, there's no doubt that they produce stunning beadwork. Their round-robin projects sound ridiculously fun; each member starts with a base (a perfume bottle or a purse for example), beads their own section and passes it on. By the time the base gets back to its originator they have a piece of completely unique beadwork and a beautiful sense of communal pride. Board member Johanna Zitto, says "SJBS members are friendly, welcoming, collaborative, and genuinely willing to help each other. It's a culture we nourish and cherish. It's a wonderful group of gifted ladies, some of whom have become good friends over the years – we learn from, teach and inspire each other."

Co-President of the group, Nicki Russo, has come on leaps and bounds since becoming a member, "It was a lucky day when a friend mentioned that there was a SJBS meeting about an hour north of my home. Since joining the group, my beading has improved dramatically, and my love of bead weaving and bead embroidery continues to grow. I now create my own designs, sell my own kits, and teach others to improve their abilities and knowledge. SJBS has given me the opportunity to lead a couple of bead education sessions, which has allowed me to gain confidence when teaching."

If you've been inspired by SJBS to join a beading group or start one yourself then being stuck inside need not put your plans on hold. You can check the Beadworkers Guild website for our groups listings or contact us at Dear Journal (details on page 36) to put out a call for beadworkers in your area.



You can find the South Jersey Bead Society online via their website at www.southjerseybeadsociety.org or their Facebook page at www.facebook.com/groups/southjerseybeadsociety. For more information on joining