# Hilltop Artists Celebrates 30 Years of

# Connecting Youth to Better Futures through the Power of Glass Art

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Tacoma, WA (April 26, 2024)— Today, Hilltop Artists alumni can be found in hot shops around the world, at prestigious art schools, and even on every season of a reality TV show about glassblowing. They’re also teachers, techies, welders, gardeners, writers, make-up artists, and professionals in a whole host of fields unrelated to glass. From the beginning, Hilltop Artists’ founders knew that art had the power to engage young people in significant ways that would positively impact their lives, no matter where they landed.

Launched in the summer of 1994, Hilltop Artists started with just 20 students in a former woodshop at Jason Lee Junior High (now named Hilltop Heritage Middle School ). The early 90s marked a period of unrest that made national news and Hilltop Artists emerged as part of a community-led effort to give young people in the Hilltop neighborhood a safe place to go during summer break.

Gallery owner and Hilltop parent, Kathy Kaperick, partnered with Tacoma-born glass artist Dale Chihuly to found a program that would provide local teens with arts instruction taught by established artists. They explored a variety of sculptural mediums, including glass. Lacking proper equipment, they simply heated up Snapple bottles and reshaped them to make something new.

Recognizing the viability and allure of what they started, Hilltop Artists and Tacoma Public Schools developed a partnership that led to the growth of two hot shops over the next several years. Hilltop Heritage now boasts a world class glass art studio that not only sustains the use of up to 170 students a day, but also regularly hosts internationally renowned artists who come to inspire students and the public-alike through Hot Shop Hot Nights - a new iteration of the artist residencies that helped start Hilltop Artists decades ago.

Serving over 600 students a year, ages 12 to 26, Hilltop Artists continues to provide young people with a safe space to grow and thrive. Hilltop Artists’ tuition-free programs use leading youth development practices to welcome students from diverse backgrounds and connect them with tools for social and academic success.

As noted by Syd Bersante, Hilltop Artists Board President, “Hilltop Artists does more than teach our youth the art of glassblowing. It teaches critical thinking, communication, and teamwork. Those problem-solving skills are invaluable to our youth’s development, and to their ability to be successful both now and later in life. As a leader in business, I believe building vocational and interpersonal skills are important. The way Hilltop Artists instills these skills compelled me to join the board and contribute my time and resources.”

Even as Hilltop Artists has gained national and international recognition, Hilltop Artists remains deeply rooted in the local community. It is involved in partnerships with the Museum of Glass, Tacoma Public Libraries, Pierce County Juvenile Court, and Communities for a Healthy Bay, and is a member of the Arts & Culture Coalition of Pierce County and the Imagine Justice Project. Hilltop Artists played a key role in getting the initial Tacoma Creates cultural access tax initiative passed in 2018 and is on the steering committee for its renewal in 2025. Hilltop Artists is instrumental in taking action for the arts and the youth of Tacoma and Pierce County.

Hilltop Artists Executive Director Dr. Kimberly F. Keith grew up just a few blocks away from Hilltop Heritage Middle School. “Hilltop Artists is in my neighborhood. I wish it had been here when I was a kid. At our core we’re a youth development organization teaching social and life skills through the team-based craft of glassblowing. The process encourages young people to communicate, express themselves, and build relationships while engaged in making art. Those skills help our students grow into community members we want to live next door to and into our leaders of tomorrow. That’s what participation in the arts can do for young people, for all of us really.”

Hilltop Artists will be celebrating its 30th Anniversary throughout the year. Please visit hilltopartists.org to learn more about upcoming events and ways to connect.

**Related Events:**

***Hot Shop Hot Nights with Hilltop Artists Alumni***

Friday May 10, 2024

5pm to 8pm

Collaborative intergenerational showcase of Hilltop Artists talent!

***Hilltop Artists Exhibition at Bainbridge Island Museum of Art***

Thursday June 13 through Sunday June 30, 2024

10am to 5pm daily

Hilltop Artists and the Bainbridge Island Museum of Art present a special exhibition celebrating 30 years of Hilltop Artists! See work from artists throughout our history, coinciding with the BIMA Treasure Trek (featuring glass floats made by our very own Hilltop Artists and hidden throughout the Kitsap Peninsula).

***Hilltop Artists BIMA Exhibition Opening Party***

Saturday June 22, 2024

5pm to 8pm

Celebrate the opening of our pop-up exhibition at the Bainbridge Island Museum of Art with a party featuring the alumni and artists from the show.

***Hilltop Artists Residency at Museum of Glass***

Wednesday July 31 through Sunday August 4, 2024

10am to 5pm daily

Join us for a special opportunity to see the Hilltop Artists team collaborate live on the hot shop floor at the Museum of Glass! Our residency with MoG is your chance to see the creation of stunning centerpieces for our annual Better Futures Luncheon fundraiser.

***Hilltop Artists Arts Night Out Block Party***

Tuesday August 6, 2024

4pm to 7pm

Join us for special alumni recognition!\*

***Hilltop Artists Better Futures Luncheon***

Tuesday October 1, 2024

10:30am to 1:30pm

Featuring limited-edition 30th Anniversary centerpieces!

***Winter Glass Pre-Sale Soiree***

Friday December 6, 2024

6pm to 8pm

With anniversary-themed signature ornaments!

***Winter Glass Sale***

Saturday December 7, 2024

10am to 1pm

With anniversary-themed signature ornaments!

***30th Anniversary Alumni Mixer***

Thursday, December 19, 2024

3pm to 5pm

Learn more event details by visiting hilltopartists.org

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### **About Hilltop Artists**

Founded in 1994, Hilltop Artists is a youth development organization that seeks to engage young people through the medium of glass art. We teach glassblowing and related arts to 600 Pierce County youth, ages 12-25, each year. We support students to explore their creativity, connect to school and with their peers, and to become leaders in their community.

With two glass hot shops located at Tacoma’s Hilltop Heritage Middle School and Silas High School, we offer daytime glass art elective classes, after-school, evening, and summer programs. We offer a leadership program for advanced students, vocational training for alumni aged 18+, and arts engagement for justice-involved girls with the Pierce County Juvenile Court. Most of our glass art instructors are alumni who started with us in middle or high school.

We prioritize students farthest from educational justice and mentor youth so they may achieve their full potential. Our Outreach Services Manager provides basic needs support and referrals related to housing, food security, health, education, and advocacy needs. All services are tuition-free, and any young person may participate regardless of past behavior, attendance, grades, disabilities, or artistic talent.

Named Washington State Organization of the Year in 2020, Hilltop Artists is recognized as one of our nation's most effective arts and youth development organizations. We work to improve high school graduation and college enrollment rates and to build public appreciation and excitement around glass arts. We engage thousands of community members each year through partnerships, public events, installations, and exhibits.

\*If you or someone you know is a Hilltop Artists alumni, please visit [hilltopartists.org/alumni](https://hilltopartists.org/?page_id=8843) so we can get connected!

[**Press Photos—Dropbox**](https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/fj3t2ki14yg9btyw1x9w9/h?rlkey=la1r66wle1n0a4s4fdihq4zc2&dl=0)

**Photo Credits**

*More photos available upon request*

1. After-School and Team Production students work together during a Third Thursday demonstration at Museum of Glass, February 2024. Image courtesy of Hilltop Artists
2. Hilltop Artists student, Dasein, makes a glass plate in the hot shop at Hilltop Heritage, October 2022. Image courtesy of Hilltop Artists
3. Team Production students, Eddie and Lily, put finishing touches on a centerpiece for the Hilltop Artists Better Futures Luncheon, August 2023. Image courtesy of Hilltop Artists
4. Hilltop Artists staff and students pose with visiting artist, Cedric Mitchell, during the 2023 Spring Glass Sale. Image courtesy of Merissa Humes Photo
5. The hot shop at Hilltop Heritage abuzz with activity during a typical evening of Team Production, January 2022. Image courtesy of Verbovski and Hilltop Artists.
6. Glass artist and alumni, Jason McDonald, teaching a current student, Jordan, at Pilchuck Glass School during Better Together, May 2022. Image courtesy of Hilltop Artists
7. Hilltop Artists staff and students during a residency at Pilchuck Glass School, September 2023. Image courtesy of Hilltop Artists
8. Students in the summer program at Hilltop Artists popping popcorn during a demonstration in the hot shop, July 2023. Image courtesy of Hilltop Artists.