Heart of glass

LOCAL ARTIST'S FUSED-Glass Creations Are Among the World of Treasures at This Year's Christkindlmarkt.

BY SUSAN KALIN
The Express Times

Erica Biery frequents local bars regularly with a mission in mind: to relieve them of their “empties” destined for curbside.

What's trash for most folks will be turned into artful treasures by the Allentown ship artist who makes her livelihood fusing glass.

Biery, 27, specializes in handmade glass creations — jewelry, bowls, plates, stained glass, mosaics and more. Give her a Rolling Rock Curana or Grey Goose brand bottle, and she'll turn it into culinary art as a functional spoon rest or cheese tray.

Biery is among the 100-plus artisans at this year's Christkindlmarkt Bethlehem holiday market today through Dec. 31.

A first-time exhibitor at the event, she will participate.

(Photograph: Dean V. Gabriel)

1 PLEASE SEE BIERY, AZ
Continued from A1

BIERY:
Heart of glass

during the last three weekends
of its run in December, bring-
ing along fused glass bowls,
plates, coasters, ornamental
snowflakes and rubber-
stamped pins.

The inspiration
A 1998 graduate of
Northampton Area High
School, Biery received a
degree in psychology from Penn
State in 2002. But she says she
was always dabbling in paint-
ing and drawing.

“I wanted something cre-
ative,” she says from her home
studio, where she is surround-
ed by boxes of assorted sheet
glass, fiberboard molds,
grinders, bevelers and kilns.

She puts on safety glasses
before picking up a pistol-grip
cutter to score glass.

Her love for glass came by
accident two years after gradu-
ation, she says, when she
found a job through a staffing
agency at Warner-Crivellaro
Stained Glass in Bethlehem.

Sharing the art
She took advantage of the
resources and experimented
with stained glass, mosaics,
fused glass and bead making.
She traveled the country
studying with well-known
artists in the medium and
eventually started teaching
others in classes at Warner-
Crivellaro.

Since then, she has taught a
glass fusion introduction
course at Northampton Com-
Community College and at Beth-
lehem’s Banana Factory.

Biery also presented a
stained glass demonstration
of a modified Tiffany glass pro-
ject at the opening of the Allentown
Art Museum’s “Tiffany
by Design” exhibit in the fall.

where you’re working with re-
ally hot, molten glass.”

Biery begins fusing by put-
ting glass into a kiln and melt-
ing it at temperatures about
1,500 degrees Fahrenheit. The
process takes anywhere from
four to 24 hours, depending
on the size and thickness of
the piece.

She says it takes so long be-
cause glass needs to be heated
and cooled at certain rates so
it doesn’t crack.

Fused pieces are made by
cutting sheet glass to a specif-
ic shape and size. The glass is
then stacked in layers in cer-
amic molds, often built cus-
tom for the object.

Each piece then requires a
specialized kiln firing sched-
ule, depending on the volume
of the glass. A single object
may be fired four or more
times with grinding and re-
dichroic glass, is made by
spraying metal oxides on sheet
glass. This causes a transparent
metallic film on the surface
of the glass that takes on dif-
ferent colors depending on the
angle it is viewed from, she
explains.

In creating a mosaic, a pic-
ture or design is constructed
from smaller, separate pieces
of glass, with each piece affixed
onto a surface. Grouting
is then applied to seal the lay-
er. Different varieties of glass
can be incorporated together
to create the design, she adds.

Stained glass is a process in
which small pieces of glass are
arranged to form patterns or
pictures, held together by
strips of lead or copper foil.
The pieces are then soldered
together.

It’s all those artistic oppor-
tunities glass offers that drew