

Artists Among Us — Pam Schanwald Eases Her Mind Through Beading

By Christopher Cussat

In addition to providing an outlet for creative expression, art can also serve as a distraction from the everyday stresses of work and life. Pamela R. Schanwald, RN, MHSA, has found that beading and jewelry making not only provide stress relief and peace of mind, but they also help her creatively approach problems and solutions for her professional role in health care management.

As the Chief Executive Officer of The Children's Home of Pittsburgh & Lemieux Family Center, Schanwald has been providing administrative leadership for pediatric specialty hospitals for more than 18 years. She previously worked as a nurse on the orthopedics, pulmonary, and adult medical surgical floors of Suburban Hospital in Bethesda, Maryland.

Schanwald felt the power and gratification of artistic inspiration from a very early age. "Art has been a long time interest since I was a young child. While I participated in conventional art classes through the public school system, I also supplemented my experiences with community offerings in pottery, sand art, drawing, painting, photography, and other areas."

This early interest continued into Schanwald's young adulthood, and in 1980 and 1981, she attended Interlochen Music Camp with a focus in the visual arts. Schanwald recalls that she had to prepare an art portfolio to be admitted to this competitive and intensive eight-week creative camp experience.

Additionally, Schanwald played clarinet in the concert band at the camp, and during college for nursing, she also took fine art electives at Syracuse University and summer courses in photography. "During the summer that I spent in Syracuse, I focused my work on photo journalism. As a result of my experience, I had a photograph from a gay and lesbian rally published in a local Syracuse newspaper," she adds.

But her real artistic passion in beading and jewelry making all started in 1989 when Schanwald began creating collage pins from pieces of broken watches and jewelry—even founding her own business, Timeless Original Designs. "Over time, I sold many original pieces and I was commissioned to produce pins from small family mementos including cufflinks, pins, earrings, and broken watches."

She continued to make this kind of jewelry until becoming pregnant with her son, when health concerns forced her to make a fateful switch of artistic creation. She explains, "With the realization that the adhesives I was using could be harm-



ful to my child, I instead started to produce complex beaded necklaces, bracelets, and earrings."

Schanwald says that she was also specifically drawn to beading because it is a great form of relaxation for her. "While I am beading, I have to be intensely focused and this allows me to retreat from thinking about my professional work." She also enjoys the almost immediate gratification of this art form, which is quite the time-opposite of her professional expenditures. "Beading a necklace or a bracelet is a short-term task which allows me to experience the satisfaction of completing a task quickly—whereas many of my goals at work involve long-term strategic projects."

Still, Schanwald has been able to draw a balance among her professional, family, and artistic lives. "As my children are getting older, I can set aside some time during the evening or weekends to bead." She is also looking forward to further growing as an artist through independent class work. "I haven't had much time to take any community classes—though I look forward to taking classes in the future when my schedule permits."

The consistent popularity and sell-ability of her work are a testament to its high quality and beauty—and some of Schanwald's beading and time piece pins have even been sold by the Pittsburgh Center for The Arts in its gift shop. Over time, she continued to focus on beading and eventually renamed her small, one-person cottage company, High Strung.

Although she really enjoys her artistic endeavors, Schanwald admits that healthcare is her true passion, and that she always finds ways to incorporate her innate artistic impulses into her work. "The challenges of my job allow me to use my creative energies to implement 'out of the box' programs and services. I consider my career choice and the way that I practice healthcare leadership akin to the energy that an artist demonstrates to excel in the fine arts."

She also acknowledges the often challenging aspects of living a completely artistic life. "Being an artist is a full-time, multifaceted career—one that requires great dedication, knowledge of business, marketing, and finances; I would consider myself to be a happy hobbyist."

Schanwald continues to bead for pleasure and her bead work always appears on the poster and other collateral materials to promote the second annual Art Bazaar at the Boyd Community Center. She also has found ways to utilize her art form to help charities and bring joy to others. "I have donated necklaces to help non-profits to raise funds for their special events including the annual Austin Lemieux Playroom Luncheon sponsored by the Lemieux Foundation. I also simply love making jewelry for friends and family." †



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