



Photograph by Paul Myers

Joanne Castiglione (left) and Tom Santon put the finishing touches on a glass pumpkin at Holy City Glass in Los Gatos.

Holy City celebrates 25th anniversary

At first glance, it's nothing more than a wide spot on the asphalt--a quiet, sunny clearing amid the shady groves and winding road of the Old Santa Cruz Highway in the Santa Cruz Mountains. However, on Oct. 20 and 21, the ramshackle, one-story building in that wide spot will be filled with visitors from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The building in question is Holy City Art Glass, and the dates are those of an open house in celebration of its 25th anniversary. The event is free and open to the public. It will include glass-blowing demonstrations, refreshments, and the sale of decorative blown and stained glass items, including pumpkins, fruits, flowers, eggs, paperweights, marbles, hearts, vases, bowls, plates and mirrors.

While touring the studio, visitors should note the Lombard smoothing wheel. An exceptionally pure form

of sandstone, it once stood as a column in ancient Greece, according to Tom Stanton, one of the Holy City glass artists. Long ago, he explains, a man by the name of Lombard purchased a bunch of these columns on the black market, sliced them up and sold them.

Over the past 25 years, Stanton, fellow glass artists Gigi Erickson and Joanne Castiglione, and painter and designer Lou Bermingham have transformed what used to be Holy City's post office and an adjacent bar into a studio that produces unique art glass known throughout the area. Each artist is known for his or her own style and motif, which they will be on hand to discuss during the open house.

They also enjoy discussing the history of Holy City, especially Stanton, who's been at the studio the longest. Now a rural ghost town, Holy City was a flourishing community from 1919 through 1950, begun by "Father" William C. Riker, a white supremacist and cult religion founder. Holy City once comprised an 18-toilet seat "public comfort station," a zoo of native animals, a gas station, Riker's collection of Cadillacs and a planetarium where people supposedly could buy acreage on the moon.

The town began to dwindle when the new Highway 17 was completed, and then a series of fires in the later 1950s destroyed most of the buildings, which hammered another nail into Holy City's coffin. Riker lived his last years at Agnews State Hospital, where he died at age 96, having converted to Catholicism three years earlier.

Holy City Art Glass is at 21200 Old Santa Cruz Highway. For directions or more information, call 408.353.4426.
