

Alfred University alumnus nearing end of weeks-long Glass Barge journey

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G Brian Juk ♦01 shows spectators on the Glass Barge a finished piece of art.

PALMYRA, NY – Alfred University alumnus G Brian Juk makes a living creating beautiful pieces of glass art. For much of the summer, he has been demonstrating his craft to thousands aboard a floating hot glass shop traveling the Erie Canal.

The Glass Barge is a 30-by-80 foot vessel which contains a hot glass shop and seating for over 100 spectators. It has been on the Erie Canal since late June, stopping at various points along the way for public glassblowing demonstrations. Organized through the Corning Museum of Glass, the Glass Barge is in the midst of a four-month trek from Brooklyn to Watkins Glen, commemorating both the 150th anniversary of glassmaking in Corning and the bicentennial of the Erie Canal.

The barge's trip is meant to replicate the Brooklyn Flint Glass Company's move in 1868 from Brooklyn to Corning. Equipment from Brooklyn Flint Glass was transported to Corning and the company was renamed Corning Flint Glass Works, the precursor to Corning Glass Works, which today is Corning Inc.

Learn more about the Glass Barge [here](#).

After leaving Brooklyn on May 28, the Glass Barge made a handful of stops along the Hudson River before getting on the Erie Canal in Troy (near Albany) on June 21. Two days later, the barge arrived in Waterford, where G Brian (his preferred moniker) got on board.

G Brian graduated from Alfred University in 2001 with a B.F.A. degree (minor in art education) and a year later earned his New York State teacher certification. The Detroit native has worked at the Corning Museum of Glass for 15 years and is a gaffer (glassblower) in the museum's Hot Glass Show. He also makes glass art at Steuben County Glass, his studio in Corning.

Part of his work at Corning Museum of Glass involves taking part in community outreach efforts to educate people on glass and its many uses, including as a medium for art. G Brian spent 10 years giving glassblowing exhibitions on celebrity ocean cruises around the world and regularly gives demonstrations at the museum. His role as a glass ambassador is one enjoys.

"I just love talking with all the people we meet along the way," said G Brian during a break in the demonstrations

given at a stop Tuesday (Aug. 28) in Palmyra, NY. “For years I did the celebrity cruises and got to talk to people from around the world about glass. It’s nice to get out and do it in our own backyard.”

A team of three gaffers typically participates in the glassblowing shows at each stop along the canal, rotating in the roles of gaffer, assistant and narrator. Another Alfred University alumnus, Tom Ryder (B.F.A., 2009) spent some time giving glassblowing demonstrations on the Glass Barge in the earlier portion of its journey.

The Glass Barge traveled as far west as Buffalo before reversing course and heading east. It departed Palmyra Tuesday for Seneca Falls, where it will be docked for three days (Sept. 1-3) before moving down Seneca Lake to Watkins Glen. There it will stay for three days, Sept. 14-16, with G Brian and his fellow gaffers giving several demonstrations. By the time the trip wraps up, G Brian estimates he and his colleagues will have been part of more than 1,500 demonstrations given to well in excess of 75,000 people.

The gaffers have made hundreds of pieces of glass art along the way; much of it has been presented as gifts to sponsors and volunteers who have made the barge trip possible. G Brian and his colleagues from the museum don’t spend their nights on the Glass Barge; rather they stay in hotels and drive to meet up at the next demonstration site.

The celebration of the 150th anniversary of glass making in Corning continues Sept. 22, when the City of Corning holds its Harvest Festival. The event will include glassblowing and glass cutting demonstrations as well as make your own glass experiences, sponsored by Corning Museum of Glass.

By the time the Glass Barge wraps up its stay in Watkins Glen, G Brian will have spent nearly 11 weeks giving demonstrations. Along the way, he has made new friends, including the crew from the *Lois McClure*, a full-scale replica of an 19th Century canal boat accompanying the Glass Barge as part of the Erie Canal bicentennial celebration.

“It’s been awesome,” he said. “It will be bittersweet when we’re finished,” he said.

G Brian said educating the public not only on the art of glassblowing, but also on the important work done by Corning Inc., has been rewarding.

“Corning has revolutionized the world and the way we live,” he said, referring to Corning Inc.-made products like Gorilla Glass, Pyrex and CorningWare, as well as the company’s groundbreaking developments in fiber optics. “To be able to represent Corning has been great.”

The Glass Barge demonstrations also gives the public and look at the science that accompanies glass art, something he learned to appreciate while a student at Alfred University.

“The collaboration between art and science – Alfred has really given me an appreciation of the two and how they are related,” he said. “Glass is such an artistic material, with its color and transparency, but you have all these innovations with glass through physics and chemistry. It really is a remarkable material.”