

Cathy Collison and her

By Myrna CG Mibus
Photos by Aaron Schomburg

Bottle Cap Beads





Inventing a mini piece of art out of recycled materials wasn't what Cathy Collison had on her mind when she went to her studio one evening with a handful of bottle caps. She simply wanted to create something new and have fun. Little did she know that her evening of playing with used bottle caps was going to result in a new business venture – Bottle Cap Beads.

Cathy's need to make things, and have fun in the process, has been the driving force behind her 15 years as a jewelry designer and business owner. "I'm one of those people that's always making things. That doesn't necessarily mean that I'm good at it," she laughs. Her customers, employees and friends at Glass Garden Beads, her full-service bead store in Northfield, Minnesota, would disagree for Cathy is known for her creative flair in designing beads and jewelry. Still, Cathy insists, her Bottle Cap Beads didn't come out of trying to make something beautiful. Instead, they developed because she had an idea and she needed to go through the creative process to make a puffy little bottle cap bead.

The vision for the Bottle Cap Bead came to Cathy five years ago when she saw some silver, lentil shaped beads that her friend, artist Leanne Stremcha, made. She loved the beads and wanted to make something like them - but didn't know exactly what. One evening, the image of Stremcha's beads strong in her mind, Cathy saw some bottle caps on her kitchen counter, felt inspired, grabbed the caps and headed to her studio.

She pounded, she played and she soldered. A few hours later Cathy had a handful of bottle cap beads. The prototypes didn't match the picture in her mind, but they inspired Cathy to play and experiment with her bottle cap bead concept for the next three years.

She didn't plan to market her new creation but when she showed the beads to people, "Everybody responded to them," says Cathy, "even if they weren't into beads." Realizing there was a ▶



Puzzled about radio advertising?
Piece it together with help from Radio Mankato.

Radio MANKATO
The Sound of Southern Minnesota

507-345-4537
www.radiomankato.com
59346 MADISON AVE MANKATO MN 56001

www.fan1230.com

Go Green...
Our earth friendly water softener recycles unused salt saving 20% or more salt.

with Salt Recycling!
Available only from **McGowan**



WATER CONDITIONING

507-388-3361
mcgowanwater.com




Need more time for your growing business?

Our specialized staff can help by providing professional accounting, tax, and consulting services that work in partnership with your business.

Call or visit our website to learn more
507-625-4910 or 1-800-506-5270
www.kitchenmaster.com

KITCHENMASTER
CPAs AND CONSULTANTS

- Accounting
- Tax Planning/Compliance
- Strategic Guidance



Certified Public Accountants



Puzzled about radio advertising?
Piece it together with help from Radio Mankato.

Radio MANKATO
The Sound of Southern Minnesota

507-345-4537
www.radiomankato.com
59346 MADISON AVE MANKATO MN 56001

www.ktoe.com



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

Cathy in her studio, creating. Hundreds of colorful and unique bottle cap beads. Glass rings Cathy makes from recycled wine and soda bottles. The Glass Garden Beads store in Northfield, Minnesota.

demand for her new creation, Cathy set out to manufacture her Bottle Cap Beads.

Before she could begin, Cathy had to tackle the first of many challenges. She needed thousands of bottle caps. She ran a press release in the local paper, “Bead Lady needs Bottle Caps.” From seniors who had caps stashed in a drawer to the young teacher who had her students collect bottle caps on a trip to Europe, people stepped forward with bottle caps donations to help Collison make her beads.

Making each hand-crafted bead is a labor intensive process. First, Cathy cuts and domes each cap with the Ka-Chunker, a machine a local machinist helped her develop. Next she solders two domed caps together and then drills a hole into the puffy orb. She had to apply for several patents for the beads and tools she uses to make them.

Applying for patents, Cathy laughs, “wasn’t on my list of to dos. I think of engineers and inventors getting patents, not me out there playing with my toys.”

Now, five years after she created her first Bottle Cap Bead, Cathy employs a handful of creative women to make them. They make Bottle Cap Beads in two sizes and recently started making a pendant as well. The demand for the Bottle Cap Beads is enormous and Cathy has sold thousands of the beads from her store, her Web site, www.glassgardenbeads.com, and at bead shows around the country.

Cathy’s creative team is always thinking up new ways to incorporate the beads into beautiful jewelry. One of their favorite creations, Cathy says, is their “Six Pack Bracelet,” made up of six bottle cap beads. The bracelets says

Cathy, are “fun and people just laugh” when they see them.

People often chuckle, too, when they look through the beads in the store and realize they are made from bottle caps. Cathy enjoys watching them when they realize what they have discovered. “You see them think and all of a sudden they get this big grin on their face and say, ‘Is this what I think it is?’”

It’s been interesting for Cathy to see the bottle caps people bring to her because the caps have meaning and memories attached to them. Like the group of senior women, Cathy recounts, who traveled to Africa, saved their bottle caps, and brought them to Cathy to turn into beads. Then they all had special necklaces made of them to remember their trip and the great time they shared together.

It’s that kind of fun and moments shared, that has kept Cathy working on her Bottle Cap Beads for five years and keep her creating new things. “I always want people to see you can really do whatever you want to do,” she says. “Because the thing is, that’s what you have the energy for.” Five years spent perfecting a bead made from bottle caps hasn’t felt like a hardship, says Cathy. “Because I am really doing now what I’ve always wanted to do which is just make stuff.”

Cathy smiles. Hundreds of bottle caps surround her, neatly organized in shallow drawers. Bits of jewelry, empty tins and tools are scattered about. Ideas are spinning through her head and Cathy gets back to work. It’s time to get back to making something. It’s time for Cathy to have some more fun. *W*