

Glass blowing

Prof shows skills at open house

Richard Potts, who teaches chemistry at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, will demonstrate glass blowing at an open house on campus Saturday.

"It's really quite simple," said Potts, a Livonia resident, who picked up the skill doing graduate work. "I'm not a professional glassblower, but I happen to be able to make some things that are functional."

His glassblowing skills enable him to repair glass laboratory equipment and make some for custom use. All are utilized in UM-D chemistry coursework and research projects.

HOLDING UP what appears to be a rather simple glass condenser, he said "something like that would have cost \$150."

Potts is one of many UM-D faculty, staff and students, many from western Wayne County, who will present their skills Saturday, Oct. 19, in the second annual campus open house.

Most presentations, especially those involving the sciences, will demonstrate academic lessons while keeping an "ooh, ahh, gee whiz" nature to make it interesting.

Potts says the technique involved in glassblowing is simple. Natural gas is mixed with oxygen, to produce a much hotter flame (900-1200 degrees Fahrenheit). The shape of the glass on a narrow rod is controlled by a variety of twisting, turning, and blowing movements, all while maintaining a constant rotating motion to prevent dripping.

Potts occasionally teaches a glassblowing course (Chemistry 285, offered for one university credit hour). He says the section usually fills up with a mixture of chemistry majors and other students.

CHEMISTRY PROFESSOR Craig Donahue, along with Elaine Stein, will entertain and enlighten UM-D open house visitors with a show entitled "fireworks and the Big Bang, by Mr. and Mrs. Wizard."

"Some of what we do is on the spectacular side, with flames and sparks and bangs," Donahue said.

Donahue and Stein will complete a reaction that produces molten iron, as well as heat. The process is commonly used to repair railroad tracks.

Other demonstrations will involve the consumption of energy, the giving off of light, photochemical reactions, saturation, and kinetics.

"In wilderness is the preservation of the world," a statement often understood by Henry Ford, also is understood by Mike Hayes. He is a research assistant in UM-D's Environmental Study Area, located on part of what used to be Ford's Fair Lane estate.

Hayes will offer a 15-minute descriptive multimedia presentation on the area, which the university uses for research, education, and what Hayes calls "re-creation," or pure enjoyment of history.

The show takes the visitor through the four seasons of natural life — mice under the snow, maple syrup boiling down, spring flowers, "Morels guarding the forest," the green-backed heron, the yellow lady slipper, the river otter and wild displays of fall color.

Visitors will also be able to tour the area themselves, right in the middle of this year's prime fall color viewing.



UM-D chemistry professor Richard Potts of Livonia uses techniques he learned in graduate studies to design custom scientific glassware. He also teaches a class in glass blowing.

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