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Adam Ankenman's Wild Dala glass ornaments a hit for Lindsborg



Photos courtesy of the CVB

Adam and Kris, one of his assistants, at Adam's workshop in Hutchinson.



For Midsummer's Festival, Adam made these two Dala horse medallions.



One of the Lindsborg in Bloom ornaments Adam made for the event.

By Allena McNichols/
LNR

Anyone following the Visit Lindsborg Facebook Page has no doubt seen the many beautiful Dala glass ornaments that have been hidden around town waiting for one lucky person to discover. As of June 28, 116 ornaments have been hidden and 80% have been found. The Lindsborg Visitors & Convention Bureau keeps track of when the ornaments are found,

what each individual one looks like, where they were hidden, who found each ornament and where the individual who found the ornament was from. "We've had people from Tennessee and all over the place who have found them. It gives us good statistics for grant writing and just to have in general," said CVB Director Holly Lofton.

Lofton has known the artist Adam Ankenman for some time—since 2007. Ankenman was her

client when she was doing vocational rehabilitation placements for the state of Kansas. Lofton was given many clients who had autism and Aspergers syndrome and kept in touch with them—including Ankenman. Ankenman himself has Aspergers syndrome, Tourette syndrome and obsessive-compulsive disorder.

During Ankenman's placement in the program, he realized he would rather work from home than be in a traditional workforce. His parents built a studio behind his home so he could work there.

Ankenman first started working with glass about six or seven years ago when he took a class at the Hutchinson Recreation Commission. During the class, he made multiple pieces including a sunflower. He said once he had taken the class, he knew he wanted to work with glass for his entire life.

During Covid, events where Ankenman could sell his creations became limited. The partnership with the CVB allowed him to continue his work and share his wonderful creations. "It's been good for all of us. It's

been good for him to have purpose and projects with deadlines. And, for us, it's been a really great hunt," expressed Lofton.

Ankenman's mother Connie Ankenman, said the partnership with the CVB was an answer to prayer. "When Holly reached out to us my first thought was what an answer to prayer. Because we hadn't been able to do anything for so long because of Covid. We couldn't have our open houses, we quit going to craft shows, and it was really hard to get back to the glass shop on a regular basis—we knew we needed to, but thought, 'What are we going to do?'"

"We never dreamed it would be to this extent. We thought maybe we would do it for a month or so and that would be it. But, it's been beyond our wildest dreams," said Connie.

Although Adam lives in Hutchinson, his connections to Lindsborg goes beyond making the ornaments as he has Swedish roots himself. "My family is Swedish, and I still have relatives in Sweden. It's cool Adam is able to do something from his heritage," elaborated Connie.

Adam has two main

assistants who help with the glass work. The help ensures Adam can do as much of the work as possible. Both help with tasks Adam would rather not do—such as working the kiln—and the creative side of things.

Kris, one of the assistants, has known Adam for quite some time as her son went to school with one of Adam's brothers. Kris has a degree in Graphic Design from Kansas State University and does wildlife photography. She learned about the glass techniques and equipment on the job.

Adam, Kris, Connie and their other assistants have all enjoy making the ornaments and coming up with new ideas for the designs.

Clearly, Ankenman has been popular with the public as well. A Facebook post about him on the CVB's page Visit Lindsborg still has one of the highest engagements even though it was made back in February.

"It's been a good feeling to acknowledge the abilities of someone with disabilities. I always think disabilities are always just differing abilities. I think sometimes we frequently forget that. As a mother of a disabled son, I think I maybe have a different

perspective on that," said Lofton.

Although other local artists were looked at for the Dala ornament hunt, the staff kept going back to Ankenman and felt he was the right choice. That instinct paid off as Ankenman and his team keep surprising the public with new designs that delight everyone.

"Ankenman and his team keep coming up with new stuff that is innovative and creative and fun. That's the best part about working with someone who is creative: allowing them to express their creativity," elaborated Lofton.

The idea for the ornament hunt was in the works for awhile. Lofton and her team knew they wanted a way to expand on the Wild Dala Hunt, knew they wanted a local artist and knew they wanted glass ornaments. "It was just another way to support that and make it something different yet in line with our arts foundation in the community and with the Dalas that are so important to our heritage."

"The reason that we come back to things to do them over and over again is that we have an emotional attachment. So, I think one of the things we were trying to do was create that emotional attachment. Lindsborg is everyone's community. I want people who visit here to feel like it's their place too.

I think our job is to create that emotional attachment so it doesn't just belong to those of us that live here. It belongs to everyone."

Lofton hopes the CVB is creating those opportunities for visitors to fall in love with Lindsborg. "I'd like to think as we grow our community, the work at the CVB office is extremely important. That we're not just doing things for travel and tourism, but we're creating seekers of Lindsborg that seek to create their home here."