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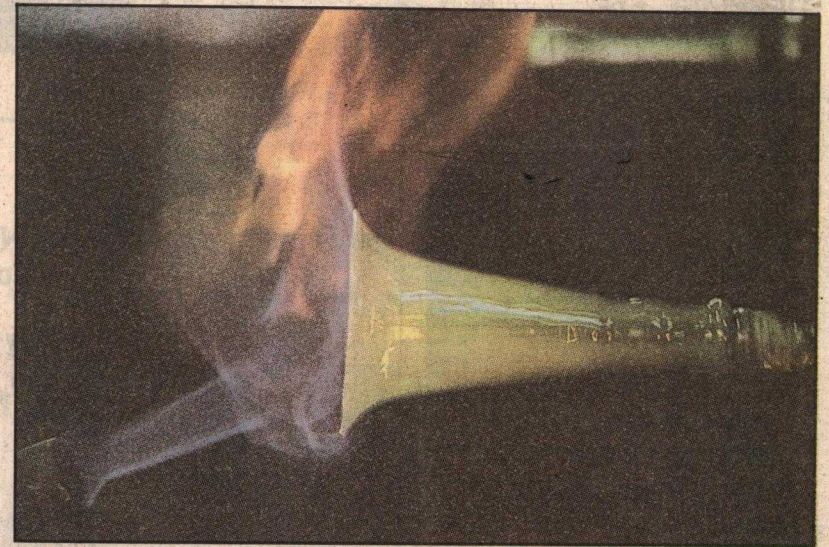
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Section

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art + Artists 1990

A glass act



A glass piece endures its trial by fire.



The Brothers Lundberg: Jim and Steve share space with their creations.

Ancient craft thrives in Davenport 'hot room'

By TRACIE WHITE
Sentinel staff writer

H EAT GENERATES from the ovens, bouncing off the bodies of the craftsmen as they move from work bench to furnace and back again.

A soft orange glow emanates from around the doors of the "glory hole," the giant oven in the center of the room.

fany glass enabled him to buy the workshop in Davenport. About the same time, his brother Steve came to work with him just out of high school.

"My parents were furious," said Jim Lundberg. "They didn't think it could possibly turn into a career. I'm actually surprised it did."

CREATING a paperweight requires the skills of an artist, a craftsman and a welder, says Steve



the workers, this could be a glassmaker's workshop from the 1700s. The tools of the trade have been handcrafted in the image of their ancient ancestors: wooden pails, handmade brick ovens, antiquated tools.

"We call this the hot room," says Steve Lundberg, 36, who is sculpting a glass paperweight. Dressed in shorts, he adjusts his protective glasses and wipes his brow with his forearm.

Lundberg and seven other glassworkers spend eight hours a day in the hot room at Lundberg Studios in Davenport, molding glass into paperweights, vases, lamp shades and perfume bottles.

Steve's older brother, Jim Lundberg, 41, started the studio 18 years ago in his back yard in San Jose. The studio was an early leader in the resurging popularity of the ancient craft of glassmaking. In the past few years, it has also begun to reap the financial benefits of years of hard work and "stick-to-it-iveness," says Jim Lundberg.

Last year, the studio sold more than \$1 million dollars of glass products. Customers include the Smithsonian Institution, Gumps, and the Nature Company. As part of its Earth Day celebration at the end of the month, the White House has placed an order for 250 of the Lundberg Studios' newest design — a paperweight of the earth as it appears from space.

In addition, the studio has become well known for its expertise in recreating Tiffany-style glass and for a new crystal encasement technique for crafting paperweights and vases which Jim Lundberg dubbed the California Paperweight Style.

"I HAD THIS mentality of being a craftsman from early on," said Jim Lundberg, who spends most of his time managing his 18 employees, selling his product and creating new designs. "It was my dream to have this business and I would do whatever it took."

Lundberg graduated with the first glassmaking class at San Jose State University in the late '60s. In 1970, he opened one of the first commercial glassblowing studios in the country.

By 1972, Lundberg had discovered how to recreate Tiffany glass. Characterized by iridescent colors, Tiffany glass was popular in the late 1800s.

"Metals are dissolved in the glass," said Lundberg. "It looks like metal on water. It was considered a lost art."

In the early 1970s, it again became the rage. "Antique dealers were banging down the doors to my shop," said Lundberg.

The sudden popularity of the Tif-

Lundberg. In the workshop, he bends over a bulb of clear soft glass fresh from the glory hole. The glass stays pliable for several minutes before he has to return it to the furnace.

Torch in hand, he lays down pieces of green glass from a long thin glass tube which he uses like a paintbrush. On top of the leaves he paints pink petals of glass.

"It's a fairly slow process," says Steve. "You can only work on it so long before you have to reheat it. If it's too hot you can ruin it. If it's too cold you can ruin it. There's so many things that can go wrong."

It's taken about 15 years to perfect the California Paperweight Style which is an outgrowth of the French paperweight style, said Jim Lundberg. Instead of encasing the designs into the crystal like the French did, the designs are actually woven into the glass ball. The French paperweights experienced a short-lived popularity from 1845-1945.

"Nobody uses paperweights as paperweights," says Jim Lundberg. "A round ball of glass has just always held a certain fascination for people. Cleopatra liked them. Victorians used them as hand coolers. There's a real seductive feel to a paperweight."

Steve Lundberg and Daniel Salazar are the expert paperweight makers at the Lundberg Studios. They've created a range of designs that includes flowers, butterflies and birds. Danny followed his brother David to the studio in 1975. Now a master paperweight designer and decorator, he prides himself on making each paperweight a personal piece of artwork.

"Julie's Rose is named after my grandmother," says Salazar, indicating a picture of a paperweight encasing a rose. "I made the Gardenia paperweight because Billie Holiday always wore a gardenia in her hair. I love Billie Holiday."

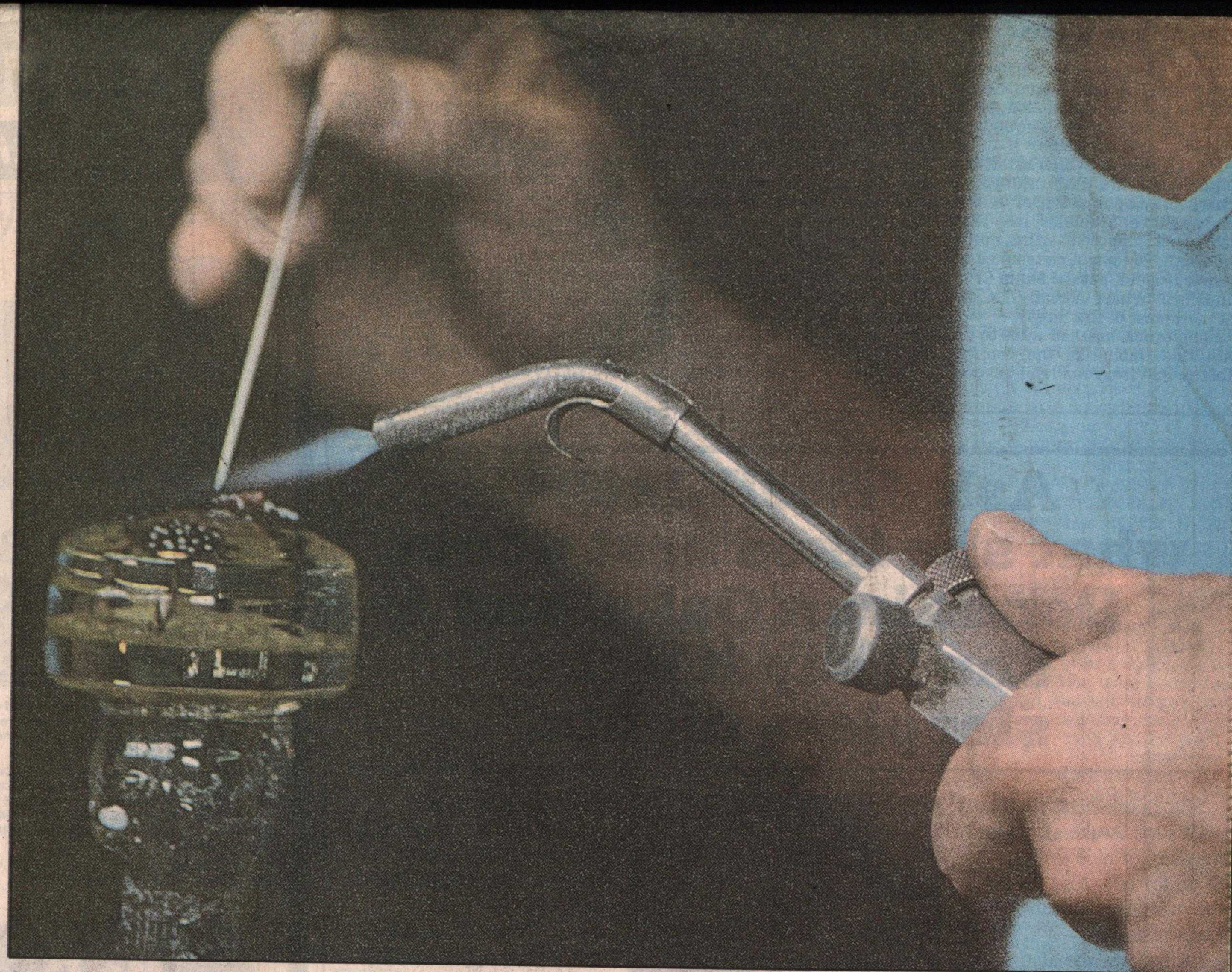
As with the Tiffany glass and the California Style Paperweights, Jim Lundberg often draws from the experience of the past for his artwork, then tries to improve on it.

"I think you can learn a lot from the past," says Lundberg. "A lot of the glass blowing techniques have been the same for centuries. Some of processes for paperweights were started 5,000 years before Christ."

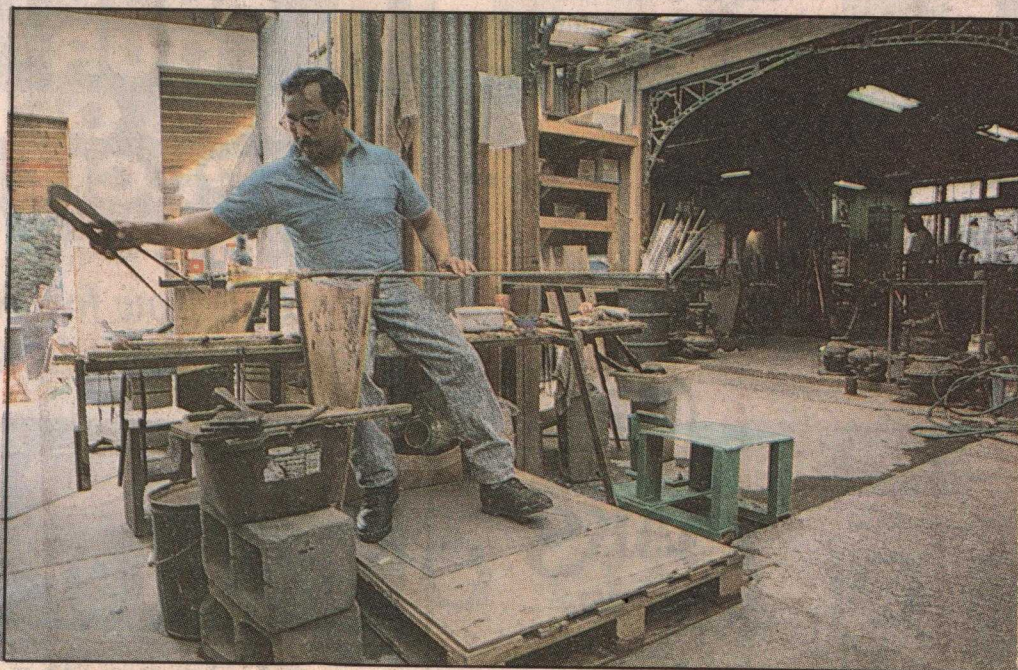
JIM LUNDBERG has 18 employees. Eight of those are actually glassworkers. In the ancient tradition of glassmaking, he makes an effort to keep less than 10 apprentices at a time.

"It's important to keep the personal touch... You can tell when things are made with a little love."

Please see GLASS — E5



Steve Lundberg puts his artistic spin on one of the paperweights that anchor a large portion of the glassmakers' unique inventory.



Mario Real works in the expanse of the Davenport workshop.



Gold lily shades in full bloom.

Photographs by Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Glass/ Tiffanys in Davenport

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Like Steve Lundberg and Salazar, some of the craftsmen have learned the trade over years of hard work at the studio. Others have been recruited from Mexico.

"We lost the tradition of hand-making glass in this country so I went to Mexico where they still had it," said Jim Lundberg. Some of his Mexican craftsmen started working with glass while they were still children.

In the hot room, Venancio Aguirre works with a wobbly mass of blue glass balanced precariously on the end of a metal pipe. The unformed mass eventually will be formed into a Tiffany-style vase. Aguirre blows through the long hollow pipe slowly shaping the limp glass while constantly twirling the pipe.

"It's like keeping honey balanced on a spoon," explains Jim Lundberg.

Aguirre works in the shop with his brother-in-law Miguel Escobedo. Escobedo has been a glassmaker for 30 years. He started learning the trade when he was 15 years old. The Lundbergs recruited him from a shop in Guadalajara in 1980. He later recruited Escobedo. Escobedo was making lamps for \$100 a week in Mexico. Now he makes \$500 a week.

JIM LUNDBERG has converted a small house next to the workshop into a showroom for the company's products and a place to conduct his daily business. There's no sign on the door. Lundberg says he doesn't need one. He's already contracted out for the rest of the year. Now that business is running smoothly, he hopes to get back to what drew him to the business of glassmaking in the first place. The artwork.



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

A two-man job: Miguel Escobedo (standing) and Raul Olivera.

Despite growing business demands of the craft, his fascination for glass has never waned.

"Glass is just such a neat ma-

terial. It's a really noble material. Other materials have no durability, no integrity. It's the great imitator of life."