

# Community graced by touch of glass

Artist Viki Keating lends hand to public projects

By Jasmine Jernberg | Sun Reporter

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**Glass artist Viki Keating poses with one of her early glass screens. Her most recent project is a 500-pound mosaic trash can commissioned by the Highlandtown Community Association. (Sun photo by Jed Kirschbaum / August 13, 2008)**

Sunshine enters the back windows of Viki Keating's Riva home and penetrates an assemblage of colored glass. As light is refracted from every angle, Keating thinks back to her childhood. She wanted to be an artist for as long as she can remember.

In high school, she used her artistic flair as a floral arranger, and after graduating from an Indiana art institute, she worked mostly with paints and ceramics. But it was an art class in 1980 that introduced Keating to her true calling: glass.

"After I took that one class, I was hooked," she says.

Today Keating, 57, is a renowned glass artist, creating architectural and fused glass pieces and inspiring local communities with her love of the medium. Her most recent project, adding to her continuing work in community beautification, is a 500-pound mosaic trash can commissioned by the [Highlandtown](#) Community Association.

Keating's first community beautification project was in 1991, when her children, Heather and Aran, were attending Davidsonville Elementary. Their art teacher had a project with a local artist that fell through, and asked Keating for her involvement. That year, Keating completed a mural with the students and became registered with the state's Artists-in-Residence program, an initiative that provides funding for educational workshops.

Keating remains involved with the program, and her projects decorate the walls and windows of more than 20 schools in Howard, Montgomery and Anne Arundel counties.

For her window projects, Keating allows each student to create a pane that she fashions into a window that remains in the school. Some of Keating's favorite projects include the windows she completed at Annapolis Elementary, including the entrance window with a crab and state flag theme, and a hallway window with different trees shown in the four seasons.

"The kids love it," Keating says. "The kids are great because they come up with things you wouldn't expect them to because they've never seen the medium before."

In addition to brightening local schools, Keating has a glass piece displayed at the entrance to the Arundel Olympic Swim Center and her most recent work, the colorful trash can that graces the corner of East and Eastern avenues in Baltimore.

Keating became involved in the Highlandtown beautification project after her husband, Tim, responded to an ad on Craig's List. Kevin Bernhard, a board member for the community association, was seeking artists interested in dedicating their time and talent. After seeing samples of Keating's work, Bernhard invited her to complete one of the eight cans planned for the neighborhood.

Keating spent several months on the piece, trying to work only in the coolest hours of summer days because the can was too heavy to transport to her home studio. The piece, inspired by a photo Keating saw of the Baltimore skyline, was created from more than 500 pieces of glass.

"It's beautiful; it's a glass mosaic, with a very artistic view of the city skyline," Bernhard says. "Very impressionistic and very beautiful ... and very heavy."

Luckily for Baltimore's waste management personnel, the can has an easily removable insert.

Bernhard says the response has been great, and he has been receiving e-mails from residents requesting cans for their corner. He has already seen the difference in the amount of trash on city streets.

"It's definitely doing its job," he says.

Some of Keating's work can also be viewed and purchased at the American Craftworks Collection on Main Street in Annapolis. "She is really quite a leader in the fused-glass field," owner Kelly Richard says. "She combines the elements very well. She explores every direction. She really thinks out of the box."

In addition to Keating's artistic pieces, Richard also admires Keating's work in the community.

"She's very generous with that sort of thing," she says. "She's high-energy but very laid-back and gets along with all ages."

Keating is planning for the start of another school year, though she does not know yet what this year's school budget has in store. She says some years she has visited as many as six schools, but it always depends on the funds available.

In the meantime, Keating plans to work on commissioned pieces and continue to develop her craft, which she says is ever-changing.

"I think it has to evolve or you go nowhere," she says. "You have to keep changing with the art world."