Profile: David Page

At age 78, community leader has no plans to slow down.

Alain Nahajewski | Contributing Writer

David Page fits a lot of activity into a day. He's a partner with the Honigman law firm in Detroit, where he's worked for 53 years. He's vice chair of the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy. He chairs the Children's Hospital of Michigan Foundation and is on many boards, including the Jewish Fund, Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit, City Year Detroit, Community Foundation for Southeastern Michigan, Detroit Zoo and Detroit Chamber Music Society. That's the short version. On his official bio sheet, under "Community Involvement," there are 60 bullet points.

He also invests in businesses, serves on company boards, and loves to travel.

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Joanne and David Denn were browsing the Ann Arbor Art Fair some 15 years ago when glass designs by Kit Karbler caught their attention.

The couple moved in close, found a piece they both liked and made their first purchase in the contemporary medium.

The Denns, who live in West Bloomfield and have enjoyed traveling to some of the exhibitions already in place, are looking forward to openings around the state.

The Detroit Institute of Arts, for instance, is reinstalling the Aviva and Jack Robinson Gallery, creating a special display of the museum’s extensive glass holdings to be on view for one year starting April 27, almost two months before a visit by members of the Glass Art Society.

The Toledo Museum of Art, which launched the American Studio Glass movement and will host the annual conference of the society, has made plans for its own exhibition and associated programs.

The Ohio museum, in 1962, held two experimental glass workshops at the core of transforming glass into a popular and respected artistic medium.

In a joint effort, artist and university instructor Harvey Littleton, glass technician Dominick Labino and glassblower Harvey Leafgreen pioneered hot-blown glassworking techniques outside the factory setting.

Also visiting Toledo will be some 70 board members of the Art Alliance for Contemporary Glass, which this June is having its board meeting in the Metro Detroit area for the first time.

All the anniversary activities remind the Denns of their personal history with glass.

“Some time after we bought that first glass piece in Ann Arbor, my wife and I decided to go to an open glass exhibition at the Habatat Galleries,” Denn recalls. “I saw a piece by Toots Zynsky and decided to get it as a birthday gift for my wife. That really started our serious collecting.”

“In 2000, Habatat sponsored a tour to Venice, Prague and Paris, and we joined about 30 other collectors. During our travels, we bought several pieces.”

“Remember, in the beginning, we were most interested in Western studio glass,” Denn says. “I didn’t realize how many hours would be spent in between those finds that has made and will make the biggest impact.”

Their shared interest has led to David Denn’s chairmanship of the Art Alliance for Contemporary Glass 2012 Committee, a group that has promoted the development of 167 major exhibitions and associated programs across the country.

The idea came about in discussions of ways to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the American Studio Glass Movement.

Eleven of those major exhibitions — and related ones — will take place in Michigan.

Ferdinand Hampson, owner of Habatat Galleries in Royal Oak, has defined the 2012 initiative as the largest cooperative cultural venture to take place in the United States.

“I thought I had retired from any great responsibilities when I retired from the practice of law in 2002,” says Denn, 79. “Then I took on this project starting in March of 2010.”

“I didn’t realize how many hours would need to be devoted to it, but it has been a wonderful opportunity to meet curators and directors of museums in support of the growth of interest in contemporary glass.”

Glass collectors Joanne and David Denn

The work of Jewish glass artists Daniel Clayman (left), Alex Bernstein (top right) and Laura Donefer (bottom right).

The Denns commissioned a piece by Lucio Bubacco of Italy to capture the Jewish holidays.

Bubacco shows the lighting of the Sabbath candles, blowing of the shofar and reading of the Torah. His figures of three young people represent the couple’s three children.

“The Habatat Galleries assisted us in having that piece developed during one year,” Denn says. “We keep it in our living room.”

Habatat, in conjunction with the 50-year celebration, is holding its 40th annual International Glass Invitational Awards Exhibition April 26-May 26. More than 90 works from around the world, including one by Littleton, will be shown.

Among the Michigan art and educational centers joining the glass commemoration are the Berkowitz Gallery at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, College for Creative Studies in Detroit, Flint Institute of Arts, Dennos Museum Center in Traverse City, Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, Muskegon Museum of Art, Kral Art Center in St. Joseph, Alden B. Dow Museum of Science and Art in Midland, Grand Rapids Art Museum and the Rankin Art Gallery at Ferris State University in Big Rapids.

Herb Babcock, who heads glass initiatives at the College for Creative Studies, has curated “Fusion,” an exhibition and sale that features glass along with clay and runs March 29-May 2 at the Janice Charach Gallery in the Jewish Community Center in West Bloomfield (see related story on page 45).

“Glass has a timeless elegance,” Denn says. “It delights the eye and exercises the mind. It’s so unique in its beauty that it lights up our lives to have it all around us. Our collection is something we hope our children and grandchildren will enjoy for years to come.”