



Photo courtesy of Gary Coyne

Gary Coyne

Fired Up About Glassblowing

SEEING HIS FIRST BANANA SLUG may be Gary Coyne's favorite Humboldt memory, but it was folk dancing that forever altered his career path.

While directing a Hungarian folk dance troupe, Coyne ('73, Oceanography) wanted the women to do a dance that required balancing bottles on their heads. But the closest Coyne could come to a Hungarian-style wine bottle was a triangular lab beaker. The only problem? The bottom needed to be cupped, rather than flat, to fit on the dancers' heads.

So Coyne approached emeritus Chemistry Professor Jack Russell, who taught a glassblowing class. To use the equipment, Coyne had to enroll in the class. He did, they altered the beaker, and the dance was a success.

"After several months, Professor Russell told me I was doing amazingly well and that I might consider doing this as a profession. I finished my degree and went straight into glassblowing," said Coyne.

He has since worked in Cal State Los Angeles's chemistry program for over 26 years, and is currently the only scientific glassblower in the CSU system. He's even published a textbook about safety with glass and chemistry, "The Laboratory Companion."

Scientific glassblowing is unique in that the time to construct a new apparatus can take less than a minute or it can take weeks. It might be as simple as constructing a glass rod, or as complex as making a water-cooled cell that can be irradiated with UV light.

"My job is to craft the glassware that's needed for the researchers to do their work and if necessary, help them design the glassware. They know their science—I know glass," says Coyne.