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Francis Barkyoumb is photographed at his Glass Dance Studio in Branford on April 8.

# 'IT'S MAGIC'

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## Killingworth artist opens stained glass studio in Branford

By Lisa Reisman

**B**RANFORD — On the wall of an unassuming studio pocketed in Branford's Hilltop Orchards building, a stained-glass piece shows a parrot perched on a branch, whimsically poking its head over the shoulder of another. An ethereal light glows through its vibrant yellow, blue and red feathers.

"I got the idea from a picture of a parrot in a children's coloring book and created a three-dimensional light box around it," said Francis Barkyoumb, 68, as he stood amid the lively clutter in the work space of



A fused glass sailboat made by Francis Barkyoumb is displayed at his Glass Dance Studio.

Glass Dance Studio on a recent afternoon.

Earlier this month, the Killingworth resident opened Glass Dance Stu-

dio, a stained- and fused-glass studio space that will offer classes in stained glass and fused glass making, as well as

open studios for students.

To hear Barkyoumb tell it, the stained-glass parrots — and Glass Dance Studio, for that matter — might not have existed if not for the 2008 financial crisis.

In February 2009, Hartford Direct, a Berlin-based marketing services firm founded by Barkyoumb and his brother-in-law in 1988, was forced to close the doors of its 250,000-square-foot production facility.

"We became part of the correction," he said.

Not long after, his wife mentioned that an artist had left behind some colored glass in the basement of the building

See Glass on A10





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**Francis Barkyoumb cuts a piece of glass that will be part of a koi fish at his Glass Dance Studio in Branford on April 8.**

## GLASS

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where she worked. He put it in his shed. "I figured I'd do something with it," he said.

Barkyoumb had always dabbled in art. "Carving, painting, drawing, you name it," he said.

Then he saw an advertisement for an adult education class in stained glass. He signed up. Nobody else did. They canceled the class.

Barkyoumb got the name of the artist teaching the class. It was Vinnie Yannone of Vinnie Vijn Studio in Old Saybrook.

"He offered me three classes for the same 85 bucks," he said.

Three classes later, Barkyoumb had fallen in love. With glass.

"It's the way it dances, the way the light comes through, how it's changed by the time of day, the weather, the seasons, and each time it changes, it

tells a new story," he said.

He pointed out a stained glass rendering of a sailboat in the front window of his studio, the low afternoon sun from East Main Street filtering gently above its sails. "It's magic."

After a stint running his own consulting firm, Barkyoumb took on a job as a senior account manager for the U.S. Postal Service in 2013. "I was working full time and doing glass evenings and weekends, or whenever I had a spare minute," he said.

Soon he was winning awards for his work in art shows, and selling pieces.

"All of that was positive reinforcement for me as an artist," he said. "I was never in it for the money. I was in it because I just loved it."

He pointed out a pink plate hanging on the wall. "That's a hand-blown plate I found at a flea market," he said. "I incorporated it into a stained-glass piece. I find a lot of stuff at flea markets and tag sales that

I repurpose into my three-dimensional art."

A stained-glass koi fish lay on a work table. "That's from a picture I saw on a tattoo on the back of a girl's shoulder on the Internet," he said. "I get inspiration everywhere."

A little over a year ago, Barkyoumb left his position at the Postal Service. As luck would have it, he'd met Jayne Crowley, who's renowned in the area for her artisan stained-glass restoration and fabrication.

"She's a living legend," he said. "She's been doing glass in Branford for going on 50 years, and we just connected on the history and life and future of stained glass."

As J.C. Art Glassworks, Crowley occupied the studio space in the Hilltop Orchards building.

"Her vision was to keep the studio going, so we made an agreement that I'd work with her and then I'd take over the studio," he said.

Over the last several months, he and Crowley worked on restoring the windows at St. Mary's Church in Clinton. They also did six windows for Stony Creek Church.

Crowley, who's continuing to produce pieces in her home studio, said most of the people doing restoration work are "aging out."

"We need younger people coming up," she said. "Otherwise, churches will be forced to go to the larger stained-glass studios out of state which can be really expensive."

That said, stained glass is not necessarily a dying art, according to

Barkyoumb.

"There's been a resurgence, and that's mostly because of the pandemic," he said. "People were at home and looking for things to do, so at least for the hobbyist, it's really taken off."

That's where his classes come in. "These people need outlets to keep learning, they need outlets of support, and the big challenge along the shoreline is there's really no place to learn," he said.

His plan is to offer two-day "down-and-dirty" weekend classes and a seven-week series of three-hour evening classes for beginners. There will also be guest instructors and open studios twice a month for students to practice with tools under his supervision.

"I love to teach," he said. "I've been teaching my whole career in a business environment."

With stained glass, "the way people are being taught really matters," he said. "That's why my beginner classes are about building confidence in the basics and then the open studios are to encourage development in the craft."

His mission, he said: "to make this studio an island of peace, a place to come and keep everything outside, to learn, to grow in the art, because glass is infinite."

► Glass Dance Studio is located on 616A East Main St. (Route 1) in the Hilltop Orchards Building in Branford. For information on classes and other offerings, visit [glassdancesstudio.com](http://glassdancesstudio.com), email [francis@glassdancesstudio.com](mailto:francis@glassdancesstudio.com), or call 860-614-4816.