

Lewis County Glass Museum Brings Awareness to a 'Dying Art'

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In the early 1900s, business was booming in area glass production.

"In much of West Virginia, coal was once the dominant industry, but in the northwestern corner of the state, the dominant industry was glass; 470 plus factories, and in towns like Clarksburg, Mannington, and Weston, the dominant employer was glass," said Dean Six, executive director of the West Virginia Museum of American Glass.

Now, in the wake of the state's 200th anniversary of glass production, its success appears to be a thing of the past, classified as what experts call a "dying art."

Anchor Hocking in Clarksburg closed more than 25 years ago.

Masterpiece Crystal in Jane Lew is one of five operating glass factories, none of which are very large.

On Friday evening, the Museum of American Glass in Weston auctioned off more than 200 items made exclusively in West Virginia, ranging from 19th century to modern day art and going anywhere from \$5 to \$700.

"This is kind of a smorgasbord of variety, so they can come in and look at tables full of glass," said Six.

Robert Stakeley came all the way from Pittsburgh with other members of the National American Glass Club. He said events like Friday's bring people to the area and help to keep the interest alive.

"I think it's a valuable resource for the industry, and we hope glass is not a dying art, although we know that many other products we buy are made in plastic, but there's still many products made in glass," said Stakeley.

Stakeley has been studying and collecting glass for more than 20 years and was impressed with what he found at the auction.

"If you look at the sampling of offerings we have at this auction, there's pieces that are a hundred years old to modern day pieces," said Stakeley.

Experts think it's unlikely glass making will ever be the business that it once was but want people to never forget its history in West Virginia.

"It's very important that people understand how much of a part it was of our industry and of our heritage in the state," said Tom Felt, a board member at the West Virginia Museum of American Glass.

The museum plans to have another auction in the fall.