The creation of glass, to the uninitiated, is somewhat of a miracle. Raw material, through a delicate and laborious process, is transformed into a utilitarian piece, such as the glasses we use every day—or a unique work of art, such as the intricately worked designs of local glass artist Joseph Luisi.

Step into the basement of his Vineland home and you’ll see what amounts to a glass museum containing representations of places and persons that have touched him in some way throughout his 89 years. A few examples are Dr. J (Julius Irving) in the midst of a spectacular dunk; Liberace in formal attire at his grand piano, complete with candelabrum; Mohammed Ali in his championship boxing match; and a closeup of a hand holding a winning pair of dice at an Atlantic City casino.

Careful detail is evident in all his glass creations, and he acknowledges it’s probably the result of his many years as a technical glass blower at Ace Glass in Vineland. “Making scientific glass requires a lot of precise work,” he said, “and that transferred to my art pieces.” He said he works from photographs for his glass subjects, or sometimes from life. He uses the same skills he learned as a scientific glassmaker—melting glass tubing.

(Continued on page 2)
Local artist creates unique glass figures of famous people

(Continued from page 1)

and shaping it into the desired form. He doesn’t go into much detail. “It’s just something I learned how to do,” he said. He does it for the simple joy of creating; he has no desire to sell his pieces, although their value is unmistakable.

But that’s not his only talent. He says he has gone through several careers in his lifetime: not only glass technician and artist but also musician, professor, song writer and singer. Some Vinelanders will remember the Joe Luisi Trio, which dates back to 1946, with Luisi at the guitar along with a pianist and drummer. They toured many area restaurants and one gig turned out to be life-changing—it was where he met his second wife, Lucille, at Merighi’s Savoy Inn.

He started his musical training at age 9 and studied under some well-known guitarists, including jazz guitarist Johnny Smith. He still plays today, using a synthesizer and recording equipment to produce CDs, singing and producing a big band sound.

His expertise in glass blowing led to another career, that of teaching, when in 1959 he became the first instructor in the country to teach scientific glass blowing at the Salem County Vocational Institute, now Salem County Community College. He was on loan from Ace Glass that year and in 1979 returned to serve as Professor of Scientific Glassblowing for the next 22 years.

One of his fondest memories was when he presented his sculpture of baseball great Joe Dimaggio at the bat to the player himself, in 1951 at Shibe Park in Philadelphia. Another highlight was the comment by former Governor Tom Kean of New Jersey, who called Luisi “the Michelangelo of glass sculpting in the human form.”

Still active, Luisi is looking forward to his 90th birthday on Oct. 20, 2011. He and his wife regularly work out at World Gym and follow a healthy diet and exercise regimen. His only child, Paul, is a psychologist in Deptford. There are also two grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Luisi’s story was brought to the attention of the Cultural & Heritage Commission through a résumé published in its newly inaugurated Artists’ Directory on the web site, ccculturalheritage.org. All artists in Cumberland County—including writers, musicians, and many other categories—are invited to register in the Directory to spread the word about their own unique talents.

Salem County Community College. He was on loan from Ace Glass that year and in 1979 returned to serve as Professor of Scientific Glassblowing for the next 22 years.

One of his fondest memories was when he presented his sculpture of baseball great Joe Dimaggio at the bat to the player himself, in 1951 at Shibe Park in Philadelphia. Another highlight was the comment by former Governor Tom Kean of New Jersey, who called Luisi “the Michelangelo of glass sculpting in the human form.”

Still active, Luisi is looking forward to his 90th birthday on Oct. 20, 2011. He and his wife regularly work out at World Gym and follow a healthy diet and exercise regimen. His only child, Paul, is a psychologist in Deptford. There are also two grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Luisi’s story was brought to the attention of the Cultural & Heritage Commission through a résumé published in its newly inaugurated Artists’ Directory on the web site, ccculturalheritage.org. All artists in Cumberland County—including writers, musicians, and many other categories—are invited to register in the Directory to spread the word about their own unique talents.

The Luisi Christmas tree, decorated with 100 hand blown bulbs and icicles.

Upcoming Events at Wheaton Arts
Glasstown Road, Millville

Photo/Video Contest: “The Holidays at Wheaton Arts Through Your Eyes”; Deadline, Jan. 9, 2011.

See Wheatonarts.org for details, or call 856-825-6800.

The Luisi Christmas tree, decorated with 100 hand blown bulbs and icicles.

The “Rat Pack”--Dean Martin, Sammy Davis Jr. and Frank Sinatra.