



## NEWS RELEASE



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### Turning “Pieces of History” Into Wearable Art

#### *Santa Monica’s Big Blue Bus Creates Holiday Gift Line From Authentic Antique Bus Tokens*

**SANTA MONICA, Calif.** – December 12, 2007 – When local Santa Monica artisans Susan Ryza and Sharon Keasling first saw the dozen large heavy bags of antique Big Blue Bus tokens dating from the 1930s through the 1950s, they didn’t quite know what they were getting into.

The bags were found in a vault at a Big Blue Bus storage facility, with many of them in storage for over 70 years. Transit officials contacted the local artists to see if there was a way the tokens could be turned into jewelry that people could own and wear as unique pieces of Santa Monica history.

“When we first saw them, It was like looking at coins you might see in a museum,” said Ryza. “We quickly came to the decision not to shine them up or alter them in any way so that people could enjoy the natural colorations the tokens had taken over the years. We think they’re actually much more beautiful this way.”

The jewelry line, which includes 30 different designs including some surfer-inspired designs for men, includes necklaces, bracelets, earrings, key chains and bookmarks, with some pieces containing as many as nine different tokens in one piece.

Other materials used in the designs include multi-colored recycled glass beads, semi-precious stones, natural seashell and wood beads, sterling silver, 14k gold, hand tooled brass and leather.

Each piece is hand crafted personally by Ryza and Keasling in their Santa Monica studio, utilizing designs created exclusively for the Big Blue Bus transit store. The dime and quarter-sized tokens are round with either a distinctive “SM” or triangular shape carved out of the middle, and come in shades of silver, gold, bronze, gray and copper.

“For certain pieces, such as the earrings, we matched the sizes and colors like you would do with pearls,” said Keasling. “We also designed some of the pieces so they can be worn many different ways, such as the single tokens that are surrounded by gold or silver, and can be worn as a necklace, or added to a key chain or bracelet.”

The jewelry ranges in price from \$12 to \$45, and is considered limited edition because it will be offered only as long as the antique bus tokens are available.

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Blue: The Transit Store is located at 223 Broadway, just west of the Third Street Promenade in the center of the “transit mall” in downtown Santa Monica. It serves as the new home for the Big Blue Bus customer service team, and offers trip planning, maps, schedules and a large variety of bus fares, including Day-Passes, Little Blue Cards, EZ transit passes, Student Punch Cards and Metro EZ Passes.

In addition to transit fares and the limited edition bus token jewelry, the store also carries such earth-friendly products as paper products made of seeds that grow California wildflowers, organic T-shirts and transit-themed merchandise.

To help celebrate the grand opening of the transit store, a free Mini Blue pass is being offered for purchases of \$10 or more through December 31.

The store is open from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday, and noon to 6 p.m. on Saturday.

High-resolution photos of the jewelry are available by contacting Francine Pares at 949-481-7559, 949-244-4574 or [fpares@intelibrand.com](mailto:fpares@intelibrand.com). For more information on the Big Blue Bus or transit store, visit [www.bigbluebus.com](http://www.bigbluebus.com). The transit store can also be reached directly by calling 310-451-5444.

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### **About Santa Monica Artisans:**

**Susan Ryza** is a current faculty member at Santa Monica College, teaching jewelry making and fiber arts (knitting, crocheting, weaving, macrame, etc.) at both the Emeritus College and at the Continuing & Community Education Program. She also teaches classes at Wildfiber, and has taught extensively around the Santa Monica area, including the Crossroads School, Michael’s Craft Store, the Will Rogers School and the Seven Arrows School.

**Sharon Keasling’s** background includes a long career in the fashion industry, including the design of a contemporary sportswear line for her own multi-label fashion house. She was also a buyer for luxury specialty stores such as Saks and Neiman Marcus. After 25 successful years in the clothing business, Sharon decided to turn her attention to jewelry design.

Ryza and Keasling founded Santa Monica Artisans in 2006, where they design and sell original hand-made jewelry. They are both longtime Santa Monica residents.