

What is the Bead Society of Southeastern Virginia Bracelet Exchange?

In the BSSV annual Bracelet Challenge the participating member gets back the bracelet she/he created after it has been embellished by another member who is chosen anonymously. (For inspiration, Be sure to visit www.bssv.org to see slideshows of previous year's Challenges!)

There are two goals to this event:

- 1) Have fun and get a surprise.
- 2) Reach a little bit beyond your comfort zone.

Because you embellish a bracelet that you did not create, you have to think a bit "out of the box" you normally work in to come up with decorating ideas for that piece.

There are two parts or phases to this event.

- 1) You create a bracelet "blank" and bring it to the August meeting in a brown (lunch sack size) paper bag.**

What is a "Bracelet Blank?" Think simple! Your blank is the "canvas" or "base" for another person's creativity. It should be a style of bracelet you like to wear, and a color you prefer, but it should be fairly minimal in design elements. It must have a clasp, and it should not be too tight, as someone will be adding to it. It can be simply strung beads, a piece of chain, a band of bead weaving, a piece of Kumihimo, DNA spiral or a strip of leather. Whatever it is, it should not have too many colors or too many design elements that will limit the creativity of the member who embellishes it.

- 2) Embellish someone else's bracelet blank.**

Participating members have 5 months to embellish the blanks. Finished bracelets are traditionally returned to the original creator at the January meeting.

How do you decide what to do to embellish a bracelet?

- 1) Realize it's not YOUR bracelet.**

Now this may seem obvious, but it's a slippery thing to hold onto. This is the one challenge of the year where you are given something to work with that will be going back to the person who made the base. The idea is to add to it in a way that will please the person who bravely made something and entered it in hopes of getting a pleasant surprise back! So, how do you know what will please them?

- 2) Evaluate the bracelet.**

This is where you'll find the clues to tell you what the person on the other end is like. Are they quiet and unassuming, or are they bold and colorful? The type of materials and the colors tell you a lot! Is the design delicate, simple or strong? Is the clasp feminine, cute, neutral or unusual? Are the colors pastel, contrasting, dressy, or natural? Do the materials suggest a theme? Did the beader send along extra beads? Do these show you a color scheme or theme? Use these little bits of knowledge to make choices that will let you add to the base in a way that will please the bracelet maker. In general; harmonize with gentler colors and contrast or accent strong ones.

3) Use what you know & have.

You don't have to spend a lot of money on this project to please the person who will get the bracelet back, instead, spend some time thinking of who they are—and then spend the rest of the time having fun thinking of things you know how to do and things you already have that will surprise and please that person. And just think; someone is hopefully doing the same kind of wonderful thing for you!

Did you draw something exotic? Metal or leather or oddly bent wire? Surprise this bold adventurer! Hammer it, drill it, wrap more wire around it, cover it with fabric or even paint it. If it has holes, use them to hang things off of or weave wire in and out of, adding themed items as you go, like sea things or African beads. If it doesn't, make some, or wrap it with wire or macramé!

Did you get a piece of chain with a very unassuming clasp? That could mean anything, so it's up to you! Use jump-rings to hang charms. Weave leather or ribbon throughout the links and add fringe or scattered beads/crystals to the ribbon. Add other chains—linked to the first—or not!

Maybe you drew a woven bracelet? Can you sew things onto it? What do you have on hand? What techniques do you know? Maybe you could scatter tiny beaded items like flowers, words, purses, or color blocks. Decorate the edges with buttons, Picot stitch or crystals. Work standing fringe in a harmonizing color on a flat surface or 'in the ditch.' Hmm... Bend wire to lay along it and stitch that down with scattered beads?

Is the bracelet you got simply strung? Those are all different and all fun! Use the clues and decide what your beader is like, then tie on to one side of the clasp and add things—weaving in and out of the strung beads. Or, string more strands and interweave them, or return a bracelet that is wider than before by using the strung piece as the center or edge of a woven piece. You could even crumple the strand into a knotted shape and place it on a completely new bracelet base!

Remember...

If you choose to participate in this annual event you are opting to have fun and to challenge yourself just a little bit. That doesn't mean stress yourself out until you hate the bracelet you are working on and lose sleep over the whole thing! If you are feeling stressed at some point in this project, please contact one of the Board members for help. They will steer you in a direction that allows you to move on at your own level of skill and complete a bracelet you can be proud of!