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Rice Lake weighs the world's heaviest wedding dress

By Caleb Olson

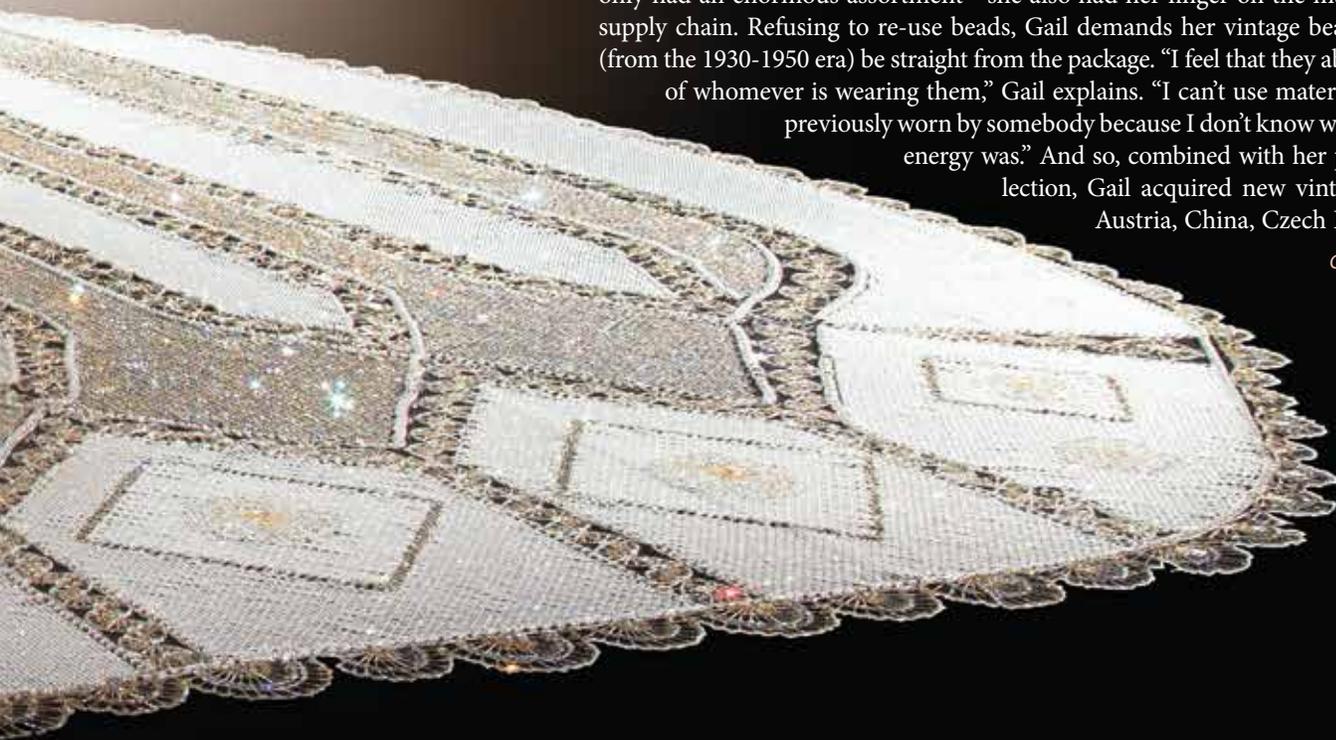
Gail Be was declared legally blind in 1995 and she thought her beading career had ended. She had carved out a niche in the industry, creating unique jewelry using vintage Swarovski crystals. Now, the demands of constructing the intricate jewelry would be impossible. Making it required incredible dexterity and the exacting use of small specialized tools. Gail still had the talent and the artistic vision, but her physical vision failed her, and she began collecting rare beads instead of working with them. Little did she know that in a few years, her eyesight would be restored to 20/20 and she would eventually create a beaded work of art so large that it would set a world record—and need a highly accurate scale to document it for the record books.

In the late 1990s, Gail received two corneal transplants and had LASIK surgery. “After the LASIK,” Gail remembers, “my eyesight was restored to 20/20 overnight and I regained the physical tools necessary to create my jewelry. I considered it a miracle, and that surgery gave me a new vision for what I should be doing in my work. I started creating my first fabric-free dress.” Gail founded Gail Be Designs, the only company in the world to create dresses using only beads, feathers, ribbons, and sequins. She wove thousands of beads and crystals into layers mimicking a fabric design, but with less light absorption. “When light shines on one of my dresses,” Gail explains, “it reflects in a magical way. It almost doesn’t look real, and it illuminates the entire room.”

Business was good. Gail’s innovative dresses were critically acclaimed and consistently set a new bar for what could be done without fabric. But Gail now wanted to set a world record. She knew it would have to be with a dress of universal appeal in order for Guinness to accept it. In 2011, she began construction on her vision of the world’s largest beaded wedding dress. Codename: Fantasy.

As a result of her years of collecting vintage, uncirculated beads and crystals, Gail not only had an enormous assortment—she also had her finger on the main nerve of the supply chain. Refusing to re-use beads, Gail demands her vintage beads and crystals (from the 1930-1950 era) be straight from the package. “I feel that they absorb the vitality of whomever is wearing them,” Gail explains. “I can’t use materials if they were previously worn by somebody because I don’t know what that person’s energy was.” And so, combined with her pre-existing collection, Gail acquired new vintage beads from Austria, China, Czech Republic, Japan,

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and the United States. She learned that the previous world record for the largest beaded wedding dress consisted of 45,024 beads. Gail had now amassed 942,000 beads for Fantasy.

Construction took 21 workers over two years to complete, with an estimated 20,000 hours of work involved. “The most difficult part was the physical pain,” Gail remembers. “My team would work during the day and I would come in at night, when I could be alone to focus. I would work ten hours straight, putting the beads onto wire. I would get into a zone and it was hard to stop. It was all about pushing myself into getting it done.” And Gail knows a thing or two about pushing herself. As a former three-time Minnesota state powerlifting champion, she has the drive to power her way through pain, out of sheer determination.

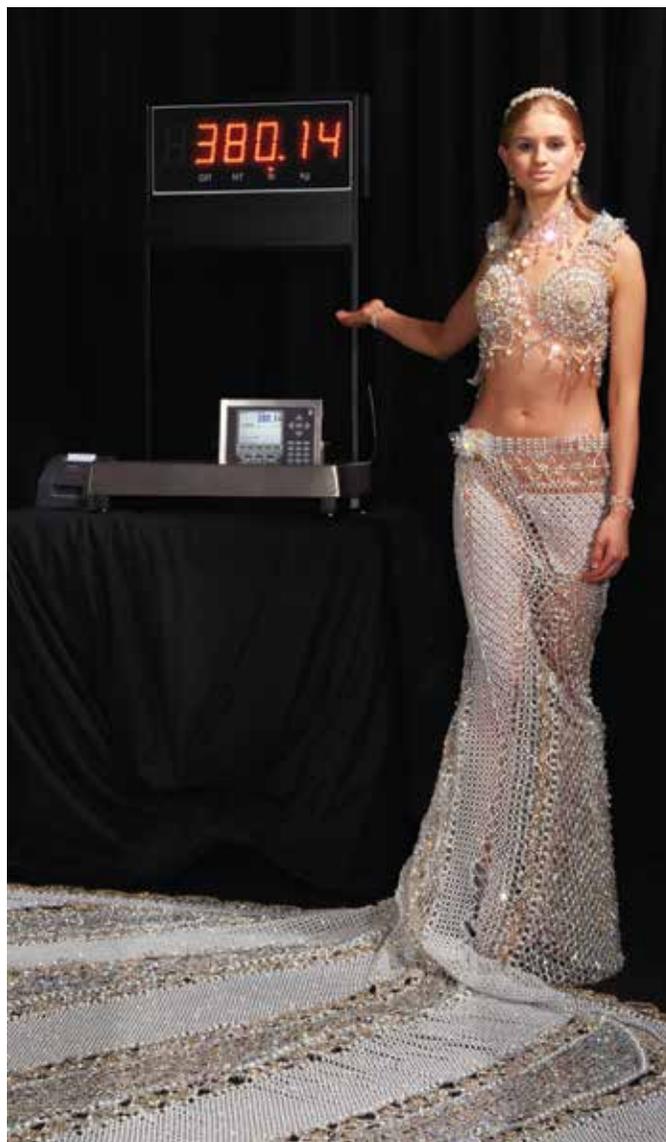
“We knew the scale would have to be fairly large, and we needed a way to display the weight very clearly and also have physical documentation of the weight.”

Atonia Effertz, office manager of Gail Be Designs

In September 2013, all 942,000 beads were in place. Seven miles of beading wire held together the 20.5-foot by 18.5-foot dress, which now encompassed Gail Be Design’s entire warehouse. “I knew I was finished because I ran out of room,” Gail laughs, “people started applauding when we reached the wall and I realized it was enough.” She initially aspired to set one world record, but now realized five were in play: largest fabric-free wedding dress, most beads on a wedding dress, most crystals, most pearls, and world’s heaviest wedding dress. A book of documentation was needed to prove the first four records, and the last would require an extremely accurate, repeatable scale.

Gail has detailed, secret knowledge on where to acquire elusive vintage beads, but didn’t know the first thing about finding an appropriate scale. She was talking about it one day when one of the studio’s visitors recommended Rice Lake Weighing Systems. Jarrett Bromley happened to overhear the conversation and had used Rice Lake scales in unrelated applications. On his recommendation, Atonia Effertz, office manager of Gail Be Designs, began pursuing options with Rice Lake Weighing Systems. “We weren’t quite sure what we needed because we have never had any experience with scales,” says Atonia. “We knew the scale would have to be fairly large, and we needed a way to display the weight very clearly and also have physical documentation of the weight.”

During the weighing process, the dress would be broken down into smaller sections, so Rice Lake recommended a 2-foot by 2-foot BenchMark™ bench scale. The system would also include a 920i® indicator, Epson printer, and LaserLight® remote display. The



A model of reliability: Rice Lake’s 920i and BenchMark provide the repeatable weights necessary to document a world record.

system was installed on a portable cart which could be positioned at different locations of the dress as needed. As each section was weighed, the 920i captured the weight, which was displayed on the LaserLight. Once all sections were weighed, the total weight was calculated, and another ticket was printed which showed each section’s weight and the total: 380.14 pounds.

“We were astonished,” says Atonia. “We expected the dress to weigh 300 pounds and at most 350 pounds.” Gail adds, “If anyone is going to break this record, it is going to be us breaking it again. Nobody else is doing this type of dress and because I invented many of the techniques needed to make such a large and heavy dress, it would be very difficult for anyone to create something comparable.”

It has been a long, grueling process for Gail Be. She went from blindness to perfect sight, her vision was changed in the process, and her fantasy became a reality. ■