

# Kathleen Denlinger rips into rug braiding

BY SALLY BAIR  
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It's fair time in Lancaster County, and crafty people are busy searching out samples of their finest work to ready them for display and competition at the local fairs.

Kathleen Denlinger, Denlinger Road, Gap, has been exhibiting at three local fairs and the Pennsylvania State Farm Show for many years, and is currently gathering a sample of her rug braiding and smocking to enter at the Solanco Fair. Later her entries will travel to the Lampeter Fair and to the New Holland Fair.

This is being written before judging at the first fair is completed, but the wool braided rug she is entering is a work of art. Kathleen recalls that she learned rug braiding about 12 years ago and started entering fairs after that. "The very first time I entered a braided rug at the Farm Show I took first," she says proudly.

She became interested in braiding through a brother-in-law who makes rugs and took her initial course at Octorara High School "to help fill a class" which didn't have enough applicants. She says learning to braid is not hard, "for me. I don't think it's difficult."

Kathleen wanted to make a braided rug for her dining room, but was cautioned against making a 9 x 12 rug for her first project. So she quickly completed a smaller 3 x 5 rug and then moved onto the larger one. The largest rug she ever made was a 12 x 16 foot rug which was sold and which took over a year to complete.

Kathleen's rugs are made from 100 percent wool and she prefers using new fabric. "I don't like to use scraps. For the time you put into it, it doesn't make sense not to have it wear well," she states. She purchases her wool by the pound at the Amish Farm and House. She estimates that it takes approximately one pound of wool per square foot of rug.

Choosing colors for the finished product is a job Kathleen enjoys and she admits that she has a good sense of what looks good together. She laughs when asked if she sells her products, and says, "I do, but I don't charge enough."

She has one rug in a home in New Jersey and before she tackled the colors she traveled there to visit the home where the three living room rugs would be used. Usually she says she uses a piece of wallpaper or a covering from the arm of furniture to help with the selection.

After selecting the wool, the first step is ripping the wool or cutting it. Some wool will rip, once Kathleen starts it with her wool cutter. Strips are cut 1-5/8 inches wide. When she has a quantity of wool to be ripped, Kathleen invites the neighborhood children for an afternoon, and then treats them to ice cream. "They think it's fun," she says. She recalls doing the ripping in her home, but the fuzz was overwhelming so now the chore is done in the garage.

Once all the wool is cut, she begins to braid. As the braiding progresses she works with lacing the rug together with linen lacing thread. She said her rugs are laced so the right and wrong side are the same.

While she does the braiding on the small rugs in her family room or kitchen, Kathleen says she sits on her basement floor to work on larger ones. "I sit on a pillow and go around the floor," she states.

In the Spring, she helped with some braiding at a local church and as she demonstrated, she heard comments like, "She must be strong. It's good she's so small or she couldn't work on the floor like that." Kathleen responds that the floor work does not bother her, and she does have good strength from pulling the lacing thread tight. "The tighter it is the better it is," she points out. She also noted a blister on her finger from pulling the thread.

The wool rugs she braids are extremely durable. "I turn my rug at every housecleaning so that each side wears better. You should also put a pad under the rug. It makes it last a lot longer," she states.

Kathleen is exhibiting a rug she made for the minister of her church, done in muted shades of off-white, light blue, reds and dark blues. She said, "I will take the rug to all three fairs, but you can't enter a rug a second time. I will probably enter this rug at the Farm Show in January but I



Despite her dry garden, Kathleen has had real success with her hanging plants this year and is considering entering them in fairs along with her braided rugs and smocked dresses. She is holding a Tahitian bridal veil and is standing next to a lush Swedish ivy, both of which she started from cuttings.

might make another one to take there." She has good thoughts about the rug she is exhibiting, saying, "I think I will win. It rolls out flat." Whatever she does, it's a sure bet it will place right up there with the best Kathleen says, "I've never lost."

She explains that judging is done on the basis of the color combination, how flat it lays when it is unrolled, how tightly it is laced and if the edges show. Kathleen pointed out how carefully color changes are effected, usually at a corner, so as hardly to be noticed.

Asked if she has a hard time parting with rugs she has



Kathleen Denlinger shows the braided rug which she will exhibit at the community fairs this Fall. Her braided rugs are made of 100 percent wool, and are carefully braided and laced to make them a work of art.

mother's interest in needlework. Kathi and Todd are members of the New Holland Baby Beef 4-H Club.

The Denlinger family enjoys doing things together as a unit, and Kathleen says she traveled with her three younger children to Kansas City when Tom received his American Farmer Degree in 1977.

Another speciality of Kathleen's is smocking, a little-practiced art these days. She recalls that she learned to smock before she was married when she was helping a woman with a newborn baby. That same baby was in her wedding, and Kathleen estimates that she's been smocking for 28 years. In that time she has made 237 smocked dresses. She knows the exact count because she keeps a swatch of each piece of fabric with the name of the person for whom it was made. Kathleen says, "I started making them as baby gifts. I love them."

She has a favorite pattern for a baby dress which has now been discontinued by McCall's. Kathleen said, "I wrote to them and asked them please to start including it again. I always get an answer when I write."

A third love of Kathleen's is needlepoint, and she has lovely examples throughout her house. Her needlepoint is something she keeps close at hand to pick up and take along to a doctor's appointment and other places where waiting is involved. "I keep a piece in the car," she noted. She admits that she often sits with the phone on her shoulder and works on projects as she talks.

Kathleen entered her first exhibits at the New Holland Fair, and added the Lampeter Community Fair and the Solanco Fair. "Once it gets in your blood you don't want to quit. I pick out something and I take it. I used to take stuff from my garden because I figured if I was going I may as well take a lot," she said about her exhibiting.

When she arrives at the fair, she knows exactly what category each item belongs in to save time in entering them all. She laments that this year her garden suffered from lack of rainfall, like many others, and she will not be entering vegetables. She has several lush hanging baskets which she is considering entering if she can figure out a way to get them safely transported there.

Kathleen feels there is more competition and interest in handwork than ever, and she feels exhibiting is a lot of fun. She said she has met many people whom she gets to know as they each return to the fair to enter and pick up their exhibits.

An extremely busy homemaker, Kathleen also sings in the choir at Bellevue Presbyterian Church in Gap and serves as a substitute Sunday School teacher as well as helping with Bible School. She is active in the women's group which serves wedding receptions, funeral lunches and other food functions at the church.

Kathleen is in charge of Meals on Wheels in the Gap area, something she said she thoroughly enjoys. "It's fun. You get attached to the older people and it makes you feel good. I've enjoyed it." She arranges for drivers for the nine families they are serving, and when someone can't make it she usually takes the meals herself.

Kathleen said she enjoys anything outside, and she relishes telling how she worked a full afternoon this summer cutting tobacco with an Amish neighbor. "I speeded out the row," she says with a laugh.

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made for sale, she laughed and said, "I usually want them done. You get tired of working with the same one." One advantage of braiding and lacing together is that color changes occur which makes it more interesting as the work progresses.

Kathleen's husband Thomas died five years ago at this time of the year, and he was very supportive and helpful when fair time comes. She has four children, Tom, 24, who lives on a dairy farm in Leola with his wife Janice and eight-month-old son Tommy; Heidi, a graduate of Millersville State College; Kathi, 16, a senior at Pequea Valley High School; and Todd, 12, a seventh grader. The children all help around the house, with Heidi sharing her



Needlepoint is a favorite craft of Kathleen's. Here is an antique shoe polishing chest which she refinished and created a needlepoint for.



This is an example of the smocking which Kathleen does on little girls' dresses. She will exhibit a smocked dress at the community fairs, along with other hand work she creates.