

Weaver finds art, competition compatible

BY SALLY BAIR
Staff Correspondent

In the ten years since she learned to weave, Carol Buskirk has become an accomplished weaver who enjoys custom designing and now gives lessons and operates a small retail business in her rural Dauphin County home.

Carol was also the weaver on the winning team, the Fancy Flock Flyers, in this year's Farm Show sheep to shawl competition. When questioned about whether it is nerve-racking to try to complete the best shawl in the shortest time with all those people watching, Carol responds, "The contest is fun. Everything has been done."

She points out that the most demanding part of entering a sheep to shawl contest is the advance planning which must be undertaken. Planning is probably the most important and the most time consuming part.

The team must be assembled, a shearer must be chosen as well as a sheep and a plan must be made as to who will spin and who will card. Another large part of the preparation is designing the shawl and preparing the warp which must be in place before the contest begins.

This year's prize-winning shawl was a lovely rose color, made in two pieces, joined at the center. The yarn for the warp was dyed in naturally with cochineal, a new dimension in sheep to shawl contests which gained an extra five points for the winning team.

Team members included spinners Betsy Dilger, Lebanon; Alice Winner, Grantville; and Jane Eggleston, Harrisburg. Ken Staver, Palmyra, was shearer, and Carol adds, "The sheep is the sixth member of the team."

Finding a sheep to be shorn in January is not easy, according to Carol. "A team that has someone who raises sheep has an advantage. The sheep must be healthy and have good wool."

The Fancy Flock Flyers located a sheep owned by a woman who took lessons from Carol, then got her own sheep and took a course in sheep husbandry. Carol says, "She learned how to feed them. They are really nice." A sheep that is shorn in January should either be ready for slaughter, or the owner must be willing to have it wear a covering. The shearer must take great



This loom produces many of the larger weavings Carol Buskirk of Linglestown in Dauphin Co. makes. It is a Gallinger counter balance loom, made and sold by the Mannings at East

Berlin. Carol enjoys custom design work in clothing, wall coverings and other accessories, using natural fibers.

care in shearing the sheep so as not to cut the animal and to keep the wool in good condition. Once the sheep is completely sheared, the wool is carded. This is not required as part of the contest, but unless the sheep is exceptionally clean, according to Carol, carding is necessary for a nice shawl. Carol often helps with the carding, and once there is enough carded, the spinners go to work. As soon as one bobbin is full, the weaver can begin work.

"Different teams organize their effort in different ways," Carol points out. Sometimes everybody cards and there is one spinner, and sometimes a few card and then a few spin.

Getting done first does not necessarily assure having the

winning shawl, although it does mean an extra number of points. This year the Fancy Flock Flyers came in last in time, but first in other considerations.

Points are also awarded for team identification. This year the team went "fancy" and wore lacy white blouses and black slacks; last year they wore wings! Points are also awarded on the basis of the shearing and the spinning, and the design of the shawl accounts for the highest number of points.

Other regulations require that the finished shawl be a minimum of 20 inches wide and 80 inches long, with traditional shawls having five inches of fringe. The warp had to be Harrisville two-ply dyed wool and points were deducted if anything else was used.

The winning shawl went to Richard E. Brandt, a farm realtor from Reading, who paid \$220 at an auction following the contest. He has purchased the first place shawl each year of the contest.

This is the fourth year for the Farm Show event, although in the first two years it was a northeast regional contest, and now it is for Pennsylvania only. The Fancy Flock Flyers were first in the contest three years ago, and Carol and Betsy Dilger are the only present members who competed then. Last year the team was fourth. In the first year of the contest, Carol served as a judge, and that's what sparked her interest.

Carol says, "It's really fun to win. The main thing I see in the contest is the educational part of it. We had a really big crowd this year." The education comes when the announcer keeps a running commentary during the contest, including telling the benefits of wool as a natural, replaceable fiber.

Each year there is a team award, selected by the participants in the competition, who

vote on the best shawl. This year Carol's group was also given that recognition.

When Carol began weaving ten years ago in Michigan, she made primarily wall hangings for herself and her family. She credits the Bicentennial with giving "a real impetus to weaving and spinning." Then she began selling her weavings.

After their move to Pennsylvania, Carol recalls, "I had an idea that I wanted a studio and my husband encouraged me." When they moved to their farmhouse near Linglestown, she was able to open The Fancy Flock Fiber Studio. She says her retail business is "limited," but she sells yarns of all kinds and colors in natural fibers, as well as a portable jactype loom, a counter balance loom and saxony-type spinning wheels.

She also gives private lessons, and in the fall organizes a variety of one-day workshops which includes information on dyeing, warping, beginning spinning, off-loom weaving and developing ideas into workable projects. Most of her clients and students come from a 30-40 mile radius.

Carol admits to being as busy as she likes to be, but would like to find more outlets for her own work. She presently shows a few times a year, including a pre-Christmas craft sale at the Preservation Pottery in Palmyra. She also shows her work at the Doshi Center for Contemporary Art in Harrisburg and participates in the Women in the Arts Series at the William Penn Museum. She is a member of the Art Association of Harrisburg and has exhibited at the Four Seasons Townhouses.

A member of the Blue Mountain Spinners and Weavers, she said the group is very loosely organized and mostly shares their experiences with each other. "There is no membership list and no

dues," Carol says. They meet the first and second Wednesday of the month in members' homes.

Carol points out, "I am beginning to specialize in clothing." One of her specialties is a "sherpa" jacket, which she says "was originally worn by Sherpa guides in the Himalayas. She enjoys doing custom orders, saying, "I've gotten some phenomenal referrals." She also feels sheep to shawl contests have been helpful in gaining more clients. "People associate my name with weaving."

Shawls, scarves and handbags are also part of her work, and she has begun doing rugs, which she says takes her back to her original work in tapestries. She likes that kind of designing because of the ability to work both with texture and color.

Carol expresses great pleasure in the growing interest in natural fibers, saying, "I think people are starting to appreciate them. They look nicer for a longer time, and although they cost more, they can be passed down to children and grandchildren if properly cared for."

Natural fibers are better insulators, according to Carol. "Mostly you'll find they're porous and are cooler or warmer. They offer comfort." In working with them, she says, "They're more predictable. I know how cotton and wool will react." She says cottons, silks and linens are "very drapable and comfortable."

Another plus for natural fibers, she says, is that "you are not supporting the petroleum industry. When you buy wool you are supporting industry in our own state."

To care for natural fibers, Carol suggests washing them with a mild detergent - she uses dishwashing liquid. "Just lay the garment in warm water and resist squeezing. Leave it along. Then squeeze

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Carol models the winning shawl in the sheep to shawl competition at this year's Farm Show competition. The shawl was produced by the Fancy Flock Flyers, with Carol serving as weaver for the group. It was purchased for \$220 by Richard Brandt, a Reading farm realtor.

Homestead Notes