

Canning is Career and Hobby for Ethel

KIMBERLY HERR

LANCASTER — She was up to her elbows in flour and the mouthwatering smell of freshly baked blackberry and mincemeat pies was wafting through the kitchen.

"I get in the kitchen and never get out," laughed Ethel Zimmerman, 2005 Marietta Avenue.

But sometimes it pays to stay in the kitchen as Ethel has been proving since she began taking her canned goods to the Farm Show in 1969.

"I just did it to see if I could get any ribbons," Ethel chuckled.

And ribbons she got. This year, she brought home nine ribbons. She entered her light and dark cherries, red beets, corn, carrots, peas, raspberries and blackberries. This year, she took 23 jars to the Farm Show. Normally, she takes about 36, but due to some knee surgery last winter, she was unable to can as much this year.

In addition to competing at the Farm Show, she also enters her food at the West Lampeter Fair and the Manheim Fair. The ribbons proclaiming her honors hang in her kitchen.

What's Ethel's secret to winning?

"The secret is everything is clear and how much liquid is in the jar," Ethel explained, adding that the liquid in the jar cannot be any lower than 2 inches from the neck of the jar.

"You always learn something new no matter how old you," Ethel said, crediting much of what she has learned to Doris Thomas,

Lancaster County Extension home economist. "She has done quite a bit for me."

Ethel's years of experience have also helped in her canning abilities.

"I've been canning since I was a girl," Ethel said. She remembered that the first thing she canned as a girl of 10 or 12 years old was peaches. Later, she learned to can green beans.

In addition to her years of canning, Ethel has also had a stand at Rutt's Market for almost 30 years. She sells Pennsylvania Dutch gifts, cookbooks, sun bonnets, aprons and, of course, some of her canned goods, such as chow chow, cabbage peppers, corn relish and pepper relish and watermelon rinds. According to Ethel, the chow chow is the biggest seller.

Most of Ethel's canning is done in a second kitchen located in her basement. It is here that she also measures out buckwheat and corn meal for her market customers. She also makes corn meal mush and grinds her own horseradish.

Ethel can remember years when she canned 124 cases, with 24 jars in a case, of stuffed peppers. According to her husband, Henry, they used to purchase 1100 cases of jars at a time.

Being self-employed for 30 years is a big step for a girl who grew up on a Lancaster County farm, did not like her first job away from home and came back to the farm to help her mother make butter and cheese.

"I still get homesick for out

there," Ethel said. "You are not pushed like you are other places, but I didn't like to milk. I was always afraid of the cows."

But Ethel has come along way from the day she left her first job and now that canning has brought her success, she has plans to use that success to start another hobby. She is planning on taking the ribbons that she has won over the years and making them into a quilt.

She began making quilts about a year ago when Mrs. Dora Brubaker, a friend of Ethel's, volunteered to teach her how to make quilts.

"Every step she came and helped me," Ethel said.

Due to some problems with her arms, Ethel is unable to quilt the material after she has it sewn, but that is no problem as the women at the East Petersburg Mennonite Church quilt it for her.

She has finished one quilt which was done in the Lancaster County rose pattern. That one was given to her son and his wife, Robert and Arlene. She is now working on another Lancaster County rose quilt which will go to her other son, Kenneth, and his wife, Shirley. Ethel's only grandson, Scott, also has a quilt coming his way as soon as she gets around to it.

When she is not cooking or quilting, Ethel can be found in her upstairs sewing room, which is piled high with material and two sewing machines. Here is where Ethel makes the many sun bonnets that she sells at Rutt's.

"Bored?" said Ethel, "I don't

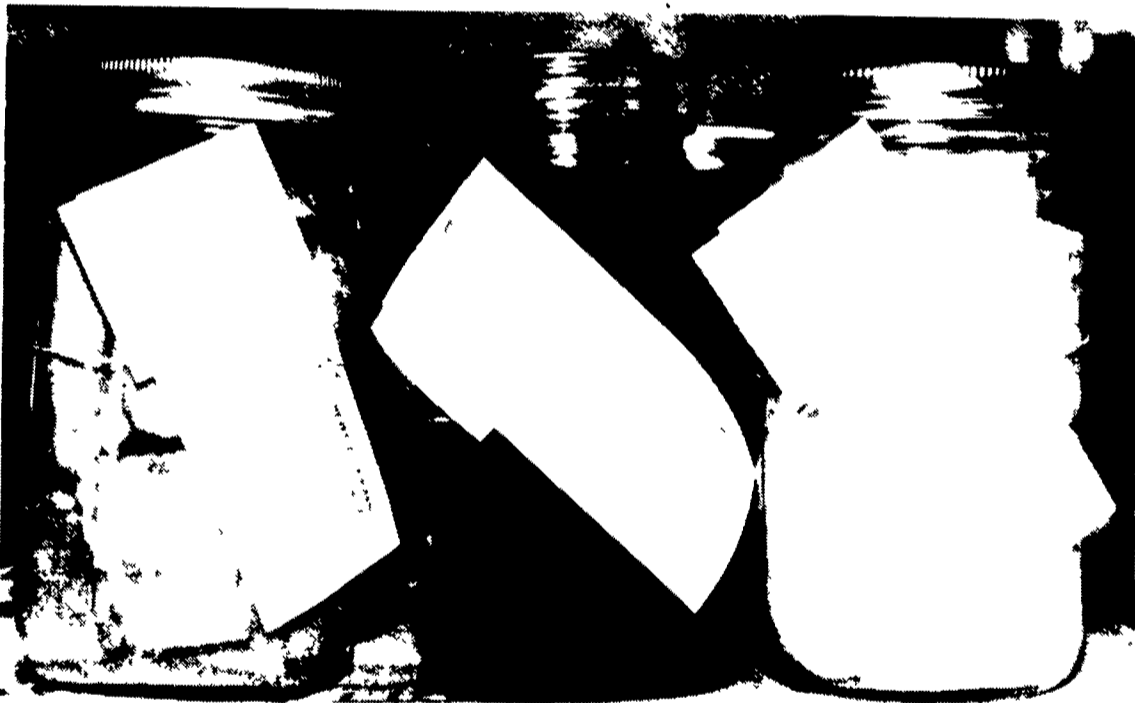


Ethel Zimmerman has been winning ribbons for her canned goods at the Farm Show for years. She also sells them on her stand at Rutt's Market. Here, she is preparing a box of her canned goods to be taken with her to market.

know the meaning of the word."

And it seems as though Ethel's life is not going to get any less

interesting, as she and her husband are planning a trip to Mexico to celebrate their 43rd wedding anniversary.



Winning ribbons at this year's Farm Show were Ethel's canned beef, cherries and pork.



Corn meal and buckwheat are also big sellers at Ethel's market stand. Here, she measures out bags of both to be sold later. Ethel does much of her work in a kitchen in her basement.



When not canning or cooking, Ethel is busy sewing sun bonnets, which she also sells at her market stand.



These quilt squares in the Lancaster County rose pattern represent another one of Ethel's hobbies, quilting.