

Seamstress uses skills to create country-style dolls

BY BARBARA RADER
Staff Correspondent

ADAMSVILLE — The foundation of this housewife's sewing talent was laid during five years in a 4-H sewing club.

When she was a 4-H'er, it was her mother who insisted that she join the club and stick with it. Now her husband encourages Barbara Saulsbery to sew. Last year he bought her a new sewing machine.

Barbara has been sewing more than ever during the last seven years, making nearly all of her daughter's clothing and most of the shirts that her husband, Jim, and son, Paul, wear. She also sews most of her own clothing.

In the last three years, Barbara has added dolls to her list of sewing projects. Creating Raggedy Ann and Raggedy Andy dolls for her niece and nephew were her first attempts at doll making. Then, last year, she stumbled onto a large handsewn doll that caught her eye. She began to search for

the pattern, which she eventually found in a magazine ad. Since finding this pattern, she has created about 80 dolls, most of them since June of this year.

Twenty of those dolls had embroidered faces and sculptured hands which required much creative time. Barbara made the others with vinyl heads and hands.

Both types of dolls measure about 24 inches in height and feature big feet and bloomers. The embroidered doll wears a short dress, stripped stockings and dustmop bonnet, and has rug yarn hair, large blue, green or brown eyes, and freckles.

The vinyl dolls wear a longer version of the same dress that is complemented with a pinafore and a bonnet.

Barbara prefers to use flannelette instead of muslin because it helps the rug yarn hair lay better and does not ravel like muslin. More importantly, though, it is a softer material to cuddle up with.

The dress and hat for the dolls require about one yard of fabric; the pinafore, bloomers and bonnet trim take another yard. Barbara uses upholstery velvet for the shoes and approximately 12 ounces of good stuffing for the body. One yard of flannelette yields an average of three bodies, she said.

"The stuffing is real important," Barbara says. "Especially on the doll whose face is embroidered."

"The tucking that sculptures the face needs to have a good substance beneath it so the nose, cheeks, chin and eyes will develop into the real look."

Machine stitching is used on the entire doll with the exception of the heads and hands which must be hand stitched. Barbara says it takes her about six to seven hours to complete one doll.

She saves time by constructing between four and six dolls at a time, taking one hour to construct each body, dress and pinafore. The hats and bloomers take about 45 minutes to make, she said. The embroidery takes about another hour.

Barbara has made a few boy dolls, but orders for girl dolls are much more plentiful. "They (boy dolls) wear a checked shirt and blue jeans and are real cute," Barbara said with a smile.

Leafing through a new craft magazine, Barbara found a pattern for a country boy and girl that attracted her attention. "I'm going to find out where I can obtain the heads so I may try making them up," Barbara said.

"He's wearing bib overalls and a checkered shirt that gives him a real little farmer look, and I can add a cap that I already have a pattern for that would make him look even cuter."

Once the dolls are completed they find their way to new homes. Most of them are purchased by women who want to add a touch of country to their homes. Many end up on small rocking chairs, perhaps by the fireplace. Although some of the dolls do go to children to play with, most are used for decoration only.

Barbara's mother has helped many of the dolls find their new homes. She recently retired from Greenville Hospital where many of the employees have fallen in love with Barbara's dolls. Other customers come from word-of-mouth advertising.

Barbara says she attended the Summerfest, an arts and crafts exhibit held at Conneaut Lake this summer, where she sold a few of her dolls.

"I also have dolls that have gone to Paris, France, Spain, Canada, and my niece carried one on the plane when she went home to



Barbara Saulsbery dresses her "country charmer" doll named Becky in a lavender dress.



Attaching the dolls' heads is the only hand sewing involved in the project. Barbara says her knees come in handy with this part of the process.

California," she continued.

If the doll is specially ordered, the customer can select the color of the outfit, and on the embroidered dolls, the eye and hair color.

Since beginning her doll-making venture, Barbara has less time for her family's sewing. Sewing to meet her family's needs has helped in the budget, Barbara said. And she added that a little over a mile from her home is a "Salvage Shop" where she buys 90 percent of her materials and sewing supplies.

Even after constructing an outfit Barbara keeps all the leftover pieces to make quilts over the winter so no material goes to waste. "Watching remnant bins are also another savings," Bar-

bara adds. She purchases all her eyelet and ribbon at a bulk rate to save even more dollars.

Her oldest daughter, Laura, a sophomore at the University of Pittsburgh, didn't have a store-bought dress until the fifth grade, and six-year-old Jamie, a first grader, has yet to receive a ready-made dress from her parents, although relatives have supplied her with a few.

"I hung out clothes the other day on the line and out of 17 shirts, 12 of them I had made," Barbara says.

Just imagine what the clothesline would look like if Barbara washed all the bonnets, shoes, bloomers, pinafores and dresses for the 80 dolls she has made.



Barbara's youngest daughter Jamie has lots of smiles as she holds two of her favorite dolls her mom made for her.



Three of Barbara's vinyl faced "Becky" dolls line up on the couch. The dolls are about 24 inches tall and feature bloomers and bonnets.