

Home economist opts for handmade gifts

BY ROBIN PHILLIPS
Staff Correspondent

FLEETWOOD — "Dear Friend, "With the Christmas season fast approaching, I am sure you have begun to think of the gifts you want to give your family and friends. I challenge you to use your imaginative mind and creative hands to make your gifts from fabric, ribbons and lace.

"On Christmas Day, give your handmade gifts with pride. You

took extra time to make it special. It took more time, love, and energy then the present bought hastily during the Christmas rush."

This is the introduction on one of Phoebe Bitler's craft program booklets. She just recently resigned as a Berks County home economist but thoroughly enjoys freelancing as she goes from county to county holding Christmas craft programs. She demonstrates. She instructs. And,

she encourages. Numbers alone show that her talents are admired; for the Berks County program this year, over 1,100 homemakers showed up for three separate sessions to hear Phoebe.

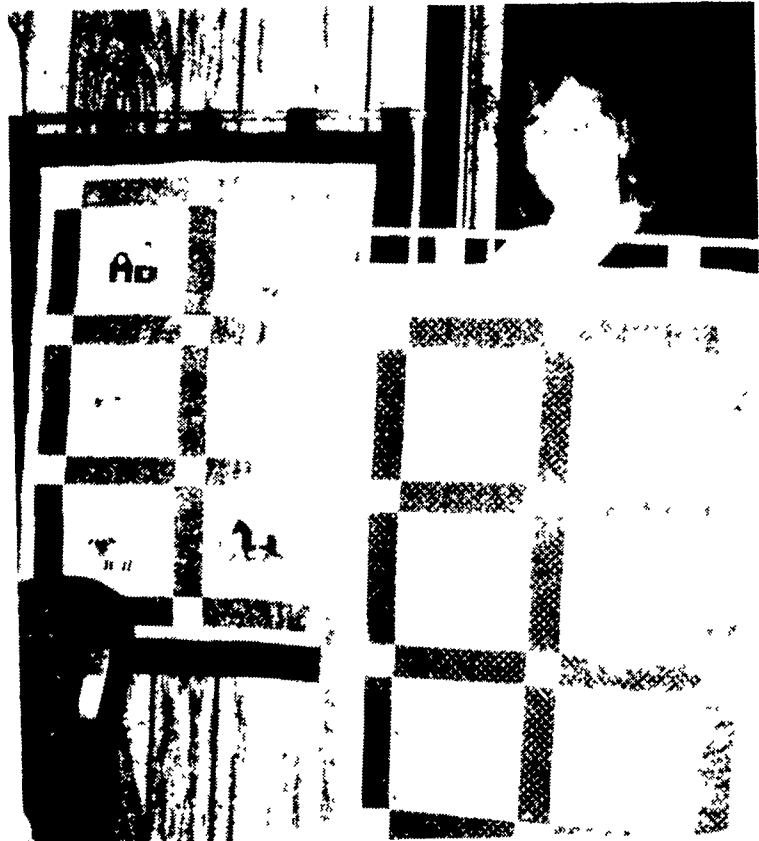
Her short letter to homemakers on her craft booklets gives much insight into Phoebe Bitler. She loves sewing. She loves making crafts, and she loves giving distinctive gifts. Her home was filled with many of her beautiful projects but she confessed to giving most of them away.

"I like to give homemade gifts. You feel like you really gave something when you made it," she states. "I love sewing clothes too. My favorite thing to sew is kid's clothes," she adds.

Now she has the chance to sew her own child's clothing. Little six-month-old Jesse was the main reason Phoebe decided to give up extension work. "I enjoyed the extension work to the hilt, but I enjoy my child," Phoebe says.

A previous home economics teacher in Lancaster County, Phoebe worked in the Berks County Extension Service for three years before "retiring" to the farm. Now she is a full-time farm wife and mother, doing craft programs as time permits.

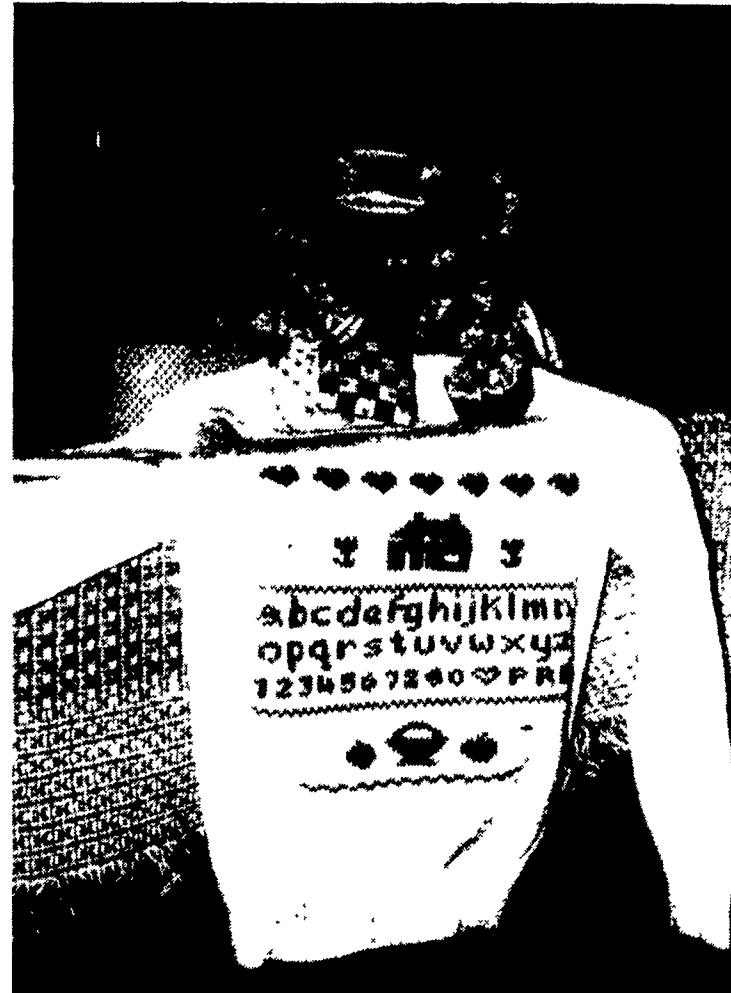
Dairy farming is nothing new to this talented lady. The daughter of Alpheus Ruth, president of Lehigh Valley Farmers, Phoebe and her husband, Dave, and her brother, Joseph, and his wife, have formed a partnership on the home farm. The Vista Grande Holstein Farm, R4 Fleetwood, is home to 80 registered Holsteins pumping out over 17,900 pounds of milk and 700 pounds fat. Helping with the showing over the summer and doing the book work, Phoebe also assists in feeding the calves. Her



The highlights of her Christmas craft programs in Berks and Lehigh Counties this year were these quilted wall hangings. The screen patches were purchased and then pieced together in this patchwork design to form the country wall hanging.



Phoebe is also very proud of her homemade luggage.



Other highlights from the 1984 Berks Christmas program included a duplicate stitched sweater, woven heart ornament, basket with cathedral window top and a heart box with bread dough ornamental rose.

heritage also makes her adamant about milk promotion.

"I think promotion is very important. If we don't promote our product, who else will?" She continues, "Farm wives can do a good job of promotion. When you have company, use dairy products," she says. Gift packages of cheese and butter are excellent choices for Christmas, she says.

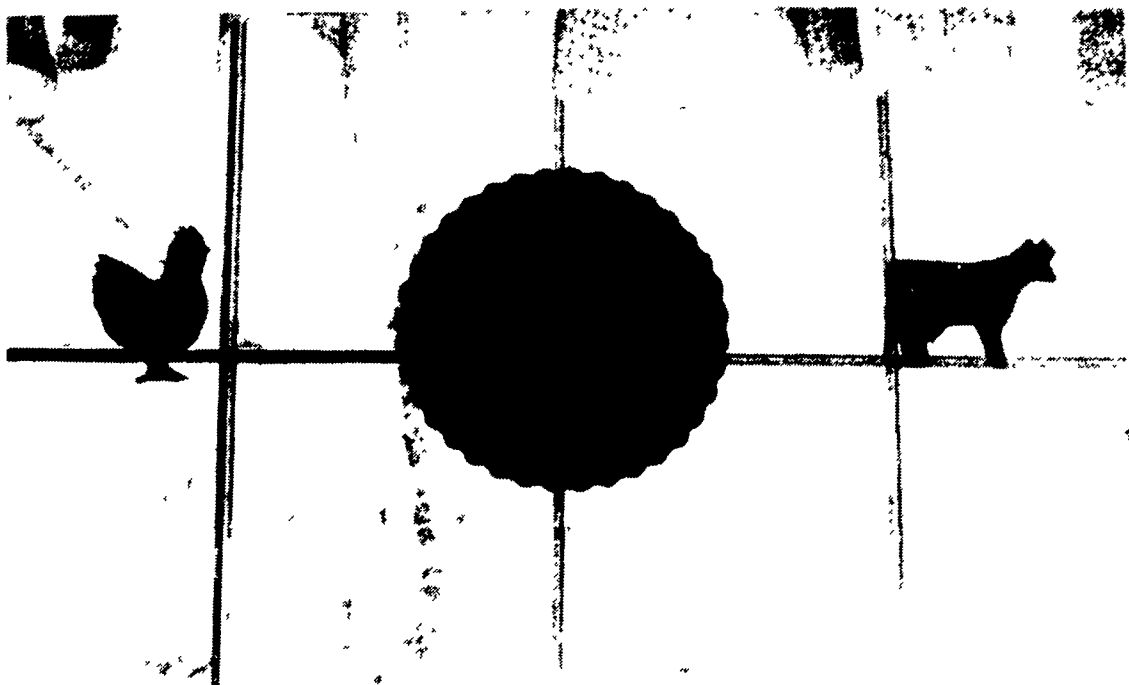
"Take milk and ice cream for treats at various functions you attend," Phoebe urges. School class tours are also good promotion ideas according to Phoebe. "I think it's important for farms to be willing to host some of these things," she continues.

Her crafts also reflect her heritage. She loves the country

(Turn to Page B4)



Phoebe Bitler instructs a doll-making class at the Berks County Ag center. "Yours isn't a 'Cabbage Patch,' it's an original," she tells her audience.



The tin punch ornaments adorn her windows.

Homestead Notes