

Search for cottage industry ends with patchwork comforters

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FORKSVILLE — Jane Roe of Sullivan County is a woman at home with a challenge, both figuratively and literally. In her quest for a small cottage industry she tried several crafts before discovering that people at craft shows stopped most often to admire her patchwork comforters.

When Jane's husband, Burgess, retired from the air force in 1977, the Roes and daughters Joanna and Linda settled on a 70-acre farm in Sullivan County. Jane is a native of the area, but Burgess found the rural setting attractive.

For a number of years Jane has been involved in the promotion of crafts in several counties. She just completed a term as president of the Craftsmen of the Endless Mountains and presently is a member of the Williamsport Chapter of the Pennsylvania Guild of Craftsmen, Old Fashioned Quilters of Sullivan County, the Pennsylvania Quilt Guild, and served as a volunteer to Elder

Guild, a nonprofit organization established to promote the sale of crafts by senior citizens.

Four years ago Jane took a course in machine quilting and has been meeting the challenge of designing and making patchwork comforters and vests at her home. She sells her items at craft shows and on consignment to local stores.

Jane started her patchwork business because, "It was a challenge to see if I could do it." She quickly adds that, "Making money may be at the back of your mind, but you can't depend on making a living for a few years."

Jane sets aside a certain number of hours each week to do patchwork. Sometimes, she admits, her family stumbles through the living room and dishes wait, but she endeavors to keep those hours inviolate.

Jane's comforters are sewn entirely by machine and tied off with yard by hand. It is not possible, she believes, to turn a profit making handmade quilts.



Jane displays a chest of barnyard animals she made by strip-piecing sections of fabric.



Jane models one of her popular strip pieced vests.



Jane quilted this pillow cover in the Lone Star design by hand. This, she says, is an example of lap quilting, so called because the small frame is quite portable.

Most people, she explains, aren't willing to pay the high price for labor involved. "I can't compete with the Amish," she adds. "They don't pay themselves for their work."

Jane distinguished between handmade quilts and the machine quilted comforters she makes. One distinction she notes is that quilts are completed by taking tiny stitches by hand through the face and back of the quilt to hold it together. Whereas a comforter of Jane's is hand tied with yard to keep it together. She says a comforter usually has a loftier batt than a handmade quilt.

With several quilting courses and years of experience to her credit, Jane is brimful of advice for anyone interested in the craft. A person who makes and sells handcrafted items must wear three hats, she says. "I'm a designer, producer and marketer."

Designing her patchwork items, according to Jane, takes much of her time. "It may take me longer to design my colors than to do the manual work," she observes.

Again and again, Jane stresses the importance of color and states unequivocally that, "Coordinating colors is the most important part of patchwork." She is adamant about color choice, she says, because she has seen so many people misuse color.

Matching colors, Jane notes, comes naturally to some people, but it can and should be learned. She illustrates by showing one of her star design comforters worked in pleasing brown and white tones. The attractive comforter contained patches of solid colors, stripes, two small prints, and two large prints. She explained that the scale should not be the same and that comforters in shades of blue and earth tones sold best. Jane's comforters are made from cotton or cotton and polyester fabrics.

Jane strongly advises against using remnants for patchwork unless care is taken to purchase additional fabric to match and complement the existing materials. Remnant pieces alone seldom make pleasing color combinations, she stresses.

Jane cited the case of one woman who constructed a quilt solely from remnants. The woman reported that even after repeated dyings, her handmade patchwork quilt would not give up its clashing tones.

The quilt designs that Jane finds popular with customers are the Ohio Star and the Log Cabin



Jane made this comforter in a star design with shades of brown.

designs. Jane, who has taken a course in pattern drafting, varies existing designs and creates her own patterns. A book that she says has helped her immensely with this is "Patchwork Patterns" by Jinny Beyer.

The next segment of patchwork is the actual construction of the comforters. This involves cutting the blocks of material, which Jane

says takes a considerable amount of time. Instead of cardboard, Jane cuts templates from a lightweight, stiff sheet of plastic. This way, she explains, she doesn't have to worry about their shape changing with use as happens with cardboard.

In addition, she glues sandpaper on the bottom of each template to keep it in place while being used.

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