

# Friends pool talent to create 'Country Lane' craft shop

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MEREDIAN — When Shirley Roe found herself swamped with orders for her homemade dolls 10 years ago, she turned to her friend Nancy Sheiver for help. Today, these two talented women own "The Country Lane," a gift shop in Meredian that offers handcrafted country items.

It all started about 10 years ago when Shirley made a doll. First, a relative asked her to make one, then a friend wanted one and before she knew what was happening, Shirley had orders for nearly 20 dolls, all to be completed before Christmas.

Knowing how much her friend Nancy enjoyed sewing, Shirley turned to her for a helping hand in filling all the orders.

For the first few years, the pair made dolls exclusively, featuring their own creations of Raggedy Ann and Andy, Holly Hobbie and Strawberry Shortcake. Then, seeking a change of pace, they started making rooster and chicken doorstops in calico prints.

When they first started in business, Shirley and Nancy worked from Shirley's basement. But because the basement offered little heat and no windows, they moved the business into Nancy's home shortly after it was remodeled.

Their new room in Nancy's home was specially equipped with all the necessary sewing items and cupboards for storage.

When the items are completely finished, they are taken to Shirley's home. Their Meredian Gift Shop is the main distribution point for their wares, but they do attend a few craft shows during the year.

By making their own patterns, Nancy and Shirley are able to offer a unique product. Nearly all of their patterns are their own; however, some of their doll patterns are revised versions of commercial patterns, Shirley said.

Usually, they said, one pattern idea leads to another, and it seems they always have fresh ideas for still another country handicraft. Some ideas come from magazines and craft shows and are revised to suit their needs.

Since summertime usually leads them to other activities with friends and family members, Nancy and Shirley slow down on their production for a few months. But in the fall, they work steadily at their business five days a week.

To keep boredom at bay, the women divide their work day into two parts. In the morning they work a few hours on one item, then change to something completely different in the afternoon. They are



Shirley Roe, left, and Nancy Sheiver, right, pull materials from cupboards to start still another project. The table beside them holds a number of completed projects.

also careful not to make their patterns too detailed or tedious, so one particular project doesn't drag on.

But their biggest problem, they say, is keeping up with all the orders they have. It seems they just can't produce their country crafts quickly enough.

Nancy and Shirley spend most of January making patterns for the crafts they will produce during the course of the year. Each year they add a new craft or two to the regular items they sell year after year. Some items are suitable for use year round, while others can be



Nancy Sheiver checks the box of potholder patterns to make sure all the necessary materials are properly stored.

## Homestead Notes



Shirley irons the covers to start the batting for baskets, a popular item at the Country Lane.

modified to suit the season by changing the fabric colors and prints.

The women are cautious not to waste any materials, using leftovers from one project in another. Each product of Country Lane has its own box. The boxes contain a finished sample of the item, pattern, and any extra pieces or special supplies needed to make it. This way, if a special order is needed or they want to resume making the item, Nancy and Shirley can quickly and easily find their materials.

They have devised other ways to streamline their craft production. Unique storage containers, like gallon-size bleach containers cut out to store laces, make the job a little easier. Using the spout as the exit, the lace doesn't get tangled and is much easier to work with, they explained. Old fruit boxes are used to store patterns.

Nancy and Shirley say they always keep their eyes open for materials that would work well for holidays and special occasions. They purchase the majority of their supplies in large quantities and at wholesale or bulk prices.

Both women have their own

sewing machines and they recently purchased a commercial sewing machine to handle heavy and bulky items.

All Country Lane items come with a personalized label or a business card, making it easy for the customer to find the source of the product.

Normally, Nancy does a lot of the hand sewing and Shirley spends most of her time at the sewing machine, but exceptions do occur at times. Regardless of who is tackling which chore though, the two women make all the items together from start to finish.

They even work together when they want to make something to give as a gift.

They offer potholders, placemats, napkins and aprons, most of which are made in coordinated colors, doorstops, quart baskets in many colors, wall hangings of all types and special seasonal decorations. They also make dolls and stuffed animals.

Customers seeking a holiday decoration, special gift or just something to spruce up the home, will find items carefully crafted by Shirley Roe and Nancy Sheiver to fit the bill.