

# New Albany Wreath Factory Gears Up For The Christmas Season

BY BARBARA MILLER

**Lycoming County Correspondent**  
NEW ALBANY — "Welcome To New Albany, Wreath Capital of the World," reads a sign outside a small village in the hills of southern Bradford County. Aside from a green wreath hung high on the local library, a casual visitor to New Albany may see nothing to warrant such a proclamation.

But occupying 17 buildings in this sleepy town is Herman Rynveld's Son Corp., owned by Herman Rynveld Jr. Rynveld's employs approximately 100 people at the New Albany plant, many of them townspeople, and another 200 workers at their complex in Montgomery. Showrooms displaying Rynveld merchandise are maintained in major cities coast to coast including Chicago and Manhattan's Fifth Avenue.

As many as 10,000 wreaths per day are manufactured at the height of the season in the New Albany plant, Rynveld said. Although a large number are shipped to the Caribbean, South America and South Africa, most will be sold to customers in the eastern United States.

"We turn out more wreaths for Christmas domestically made than anyone else," observed Rynveld.

Although Rynveld's volume business is in wreaths, the company also manufactures quality Christmas trees and a multitude of novelty items. Last year, Rynveld reported, a 20-foot Rynveld Christmas tree adorned the top of the Hilton Hotel in New York City and recently a Rynveld tree appeared on the front page of the J.C. Penny catalogue. Stores such as Hess's carry Rynveld trees and the company's novelty items are sold by Sears and Roebuck.

Rynveld immigrated from Holland with his parents and worked with them in the horticulture business in New York for a time. Then, 35 years ago while in his twenties he started the wreath business in New Albany.

Rynveld says he chose New Albany as a location for his wreath plant because of its easy access to ground pine, sometimes called princess pine. Stations were set up in locations throughout the state for the collection of ground pine.

"We used 2 ton a day when we started," he says, adding that now they use a lot of plastic.

Natural and plastic wreaths are manufactured in one building at New Albany and centerpieces and samplers are made at another, company vice president Lance

Dunham explained.

Since Christmas is their biggest season, workers begin making wreaths in March to be finished in time for Christmas. After Christmas, spring merchandise such as plastic and silk flower arrangements are constructed in time for Memorial Day, Valentine's Day and for Easter.

The word wreath is derived from an old English word meaning "to twist" and that is the essence of the wreath making process. A 2-foot high pack of 4-inch plastic bristles (usually green in color) are loaded into a machine dubbed "the brush spinner" by workers. The bristles are fed at a controlled rate and placed between two wires which are twisted at a high rate of speed to form the "branches" of the wreath.

The machine can be set to make wreath branches or to form one long continuous garland of bristles for wreaths. Garland is cut at specified intervals and the branches taken to a "tipper." The tipper uses steam to draw the bristles at the end of a branch outward over the wire so there are no wire edges visible.

Next, the 2-foot branches are loaded crossways into a jig with two wires placed longways and twisted by machine into shape. Uneven ends are then removed and the wreath goes to a wreath rounder which forms it into a perfectly round wreath shape. Lastly, the ends of the wreath are fastened together with a soft metal clamp. At this point the wreaths are ready to be decorated with natural foliage, bows, or artificial ornaments.

Natural wreaths are made entirely by hand using ground pine. Dye, softener and a preservative are added to the natural materials. Workers use wire to fasten the ground pine to a Styrofoam base to form a wreath.

Rynvelds employs another method to make branches at their Montgomery plant, where Christmas trees are the main product. PVC plastic arrives at the



Herman Rynveld Jr., an immigrant from Holland, started a wreath company in New Albany 35 years ago.



Employee Gina Epler displays a natural wreath decorated with cones and wheat.

shop on huge rolls reminiscent, Rynveld says, of rolls of newsprint. The PVC plastic is then cut into long strips to the desired width, shredded on each side, and twisted with wire into a product that may be used for making wreaths or trees.

"Customers like to see more natural foliage used as a decoration," says Dunham, commenting on current trends in their business. "They want a more quality item, a little more elegant and regal."

Wreaths are now made of grapevines and use such natural foliage as wheat, pinecones, statice, eucalyptus branches and

feathers. The ribbons are no longer of plain colors, but are more likely to be prints and solids. One advantage of this, Dunham notes, is that they may be hung at other times of the year as well.

A new twist is always appreciated in the wreath business and to ensure that New Albany remains the wreath capital of the world, Rynveld says he has one. Although he would give no particulars, he says the company is "in the process of creating a product line which will differ from the past in order to get away from the competitive import merchandise."

## Ephrata Cloister Candlelight Tours Recall History Of Religious Sect

BY SALLY BAIR

**Lancaster Co. Correspondent**  
EPHRATA — Candlelight tours have come to be associated with the Christmas season, but the tours being offered next weekend at the Ephrata Cloister go beyond the traditional. There will be lots of candlelight, to be sure, but there will also be Indians, history and lighthearted drama.

The Cloister Chapter of Student Historians along with the Ephrata Cloister Associates are presenting tours on Friday, Saturday and Sunday evening (Dec. 26, 27, 28) and will offer a unique look at the Cloister and activities there during the winter of 1755.

According to Mike Showalter, who wrote the script and is directing this year's historical tour, the scripts used are based on historical fact. However, he added, "We have woven some imagination through."

During that winter there were Indian attacks along the frontier, which was as near to Ephrata as Harrisburg, the Susquehanna River and northern Lebanon. The attacks never came closer than 13 miles to the Cloister, but life there was affected because settlers from outlying districts came to the Cloister for protection from Indian attacks.

Showalter points out that historically it is known that settlers from the Tulpehocken area came to the Cloister seeking protection, and it is on these settlers that the drama centers. British soldiers had been sent to

the Cloister to protect the inhabitants and the settlers from the Indians, but also, in part, to protect the Cloister from attacks by unfriendly neighbors.

Showalter notes that some neighbors did not like the pacifists who resided within the Cloister and felt Cloisters were unfaithful to their obligation to the state when they refused to fight the Indians. The sisters and brothers were thought to be weak and unfriendly by some.

Historically there is evidence that the settlers who sought refuge there stayed only briefly. Also, this haven was needed only during the very early stages of the French and Indian War.

To make the visitor feel a part of the action, Showalter mentions that the actors try to include them in the drama. Visitors are actually taken back in time, and asked to go through the Cloister in that guise. It is not easy for the actors to speak directly to the visitors to get them involved, but when visitors become a part of the story, it makes it more meaningful for everyone. Showalter notes, "Some people really get into it, and they can have a lot of fun."

The drama's characters escort visitors from one building to another, and they meet both residents of the Cloister and Captain Anderson, the British commander who was in charge of the British soldiers headquartered there. Showalter calls the performance a "moving play," explaining that groups are taken to

specific locations within the Cloister.

Nadine Steinmetz, curator for the Cloister, says, "These Christmas programs have become pretty popular. Attendance has practically tripled in the last few years, and it is a wonderful thing." Showalter attributes part of the larger attendance to increased publicity and to mild weather. Plus, he says, "People are getting to know about it."

Showalter notes that there is no evidence that the sisters and brothers of the Cloisters celebrated Christmas, though it is speculated that they may have had a love feast.

Showalter, who has been involved in the Cloister for seven years, says, "We try to select an event which happened in the winter" as the subject for the tours.

Following the presentation by the Junior Historian actors, visitors are offered refreshments in the visitor center auditorium.

Proceeds from the tours are set aside by the Student Historians who three years ago planned to develop a children's corner where young visitors can try on the garb of the period and have other "hands-on" experiences. Showalter said there is now a nice "nest egg" to help make the project a reality.

Reservations are encouraged because each group can be no larger than 30 people to ensure maximum participation and effectiveness. Tours leave on the half

hour from 7 to 8:30 p.m. and calling the Cloister at (717) 733-4811. reservations can be made by 4811.



These are a few of the actors who will be part of the candlelight tours being offered at Ephrata Cloister on Dec. 26, 27 and 28. Michelle Deetz is seated and is surrounded by, from left, Mike Showalter, Marc Campbell, Pete Kovach and Chris Lausch. Mike is directing the performances and the others are members of the Student Historians.