

Fireside Crafts Sparked By Silly Idea

BY LOU ANN GOOD LITITZ (Lancaster) — Some ideas seem too ridiculous to pursue. Some are so silly they provide everyone with a good laugh. Paul Graybill believed that he had such an idea about 15 years ago. He and his wife, Grace, who reside in Lititz, were traveling to Florida when Paul suggested they open a craft shop.

"I laughed for 17 miles," Grace recalls. "It seemed so ridiculous."

A few months earlier she and her daughter had opened a stand for macrame projects at Root's Market in Manheim. The orders ballooned. Feeling swamped, but indebted to fill orders, Grace tracked down a wholesale macrame yarn shop in Florida.

A few moments after Paul suggested that they opened a craft shop, the Graybills entered the wholesale macrame shop. Grace whispered to her husband, "They probably won't sell wholesale to us if we don't have a shop."

In a hurried discussion, the Graybills decided that perhaps owning a shop was not such a ridiculous idea. After a bit of whispered planning, they decided to set up shop in the barn with an old-fashioned rain barrel by the doorway.

When the salesperson asked for the name of their shop, Grace blurted out, "The Rain Barrel."

The Graybills couldn't wait to return to Lititz and open up shop.

Unfortunately upon close examination, the barn proved unsuitable for their craft shop.

Undaunted, Paul built shelves surrounding the fireplace in the family room. After attaining a zoning change and stacking crafts on the newly built shelves, the Gray-

bills christened their new store, "Fireside Crafts."

Paul said, "People told us our store wouldn't survive because we aren't on a busy street."

They also predicted they wouldn't survive because they had no store or selling experience.

They were wrong.

Grace said, "It grew beyond our expectations."

Today their shop fills five rooms with lots of nooks and crannies and is due for another expansion.

Although macrame was the rage 15 years ago, its popularity began to wane. Over the years they've learned new crafts to keep up with the changing consumer demands.

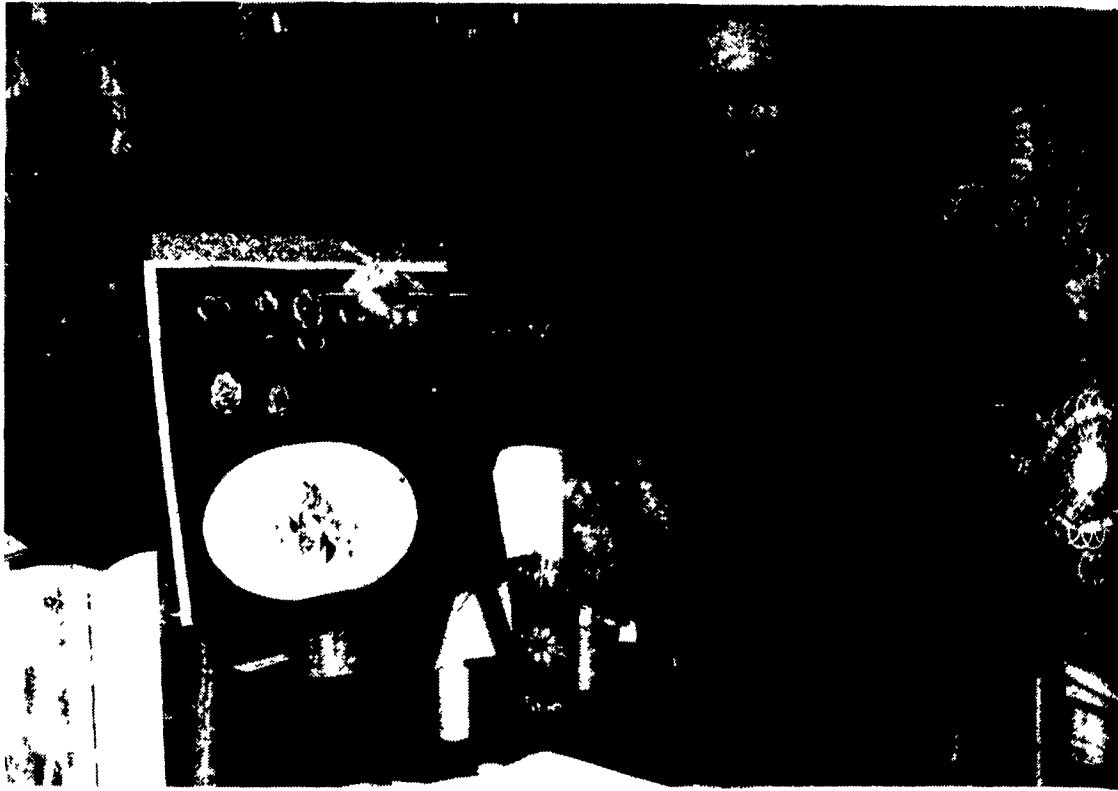
Baskets, art, pierced lampshades, and tin punching are some favorites. Basket weaving demand forced Paul to give up his fulltime job papering and painting and he now takes charge of the basket department where he dyes the baskets for customers who buy their supplies at their shop.

"Every class we offer in basket making, gets filled," he said as he rearranged the multitude of baskets in all shapes, sizes and colors.

In addition to Grace and Paul working fulltime in the shop, they also employ one full-time and several parttime workers.

Grace, who teaches both finger and brush painting, is self taught. She said, "Before opening the shop, I did do a lot of crafts and worked with church groups to supply craft ideas, but I never thought I could do this as a business."

She constantly purchases additional books to learn new crafts. "I followed the instructions in a book to learn how to do this," she said as



With a warm smile and a calm spirit, Grace Graybill, Lititz, demonstrates the art of painting roses.



Paul and Grace Graybill kneel by the fireplace that sparked the name for Fireside Crafts of Lititz.



Dottie Boudier, a fulltime employee of Fireside Crafts, demonstrates bow making.



Basket weaving is a favorite among customers at Fireside Crafts. Paul shows a customer the different designs that can be woven in the basket.

she dipped her little finger into the paint and blotted the paint five times in a circle. With her finger, she popped a little yellow center in the middle of the circle and presto—a flower. Deftly she turned her finger this way and that to produce a cascade of flowers. She said, "I've taught thousands of people how to do this."

Adults and children of all ages find finger painting adaptable to

decorating on wood, baskets, paper and cloth.

The Graybills admit the shop ties them down a lot, but they make sure they attend the Philadelphia Craft Show for retailers and a few other large ones for wholesalers.

In the beginning, Grace referred to her craft teaching as a hobby. After teaching hundreds of others, she no longer refers to it merely as a hobby, but she never tires of the satisfaction attained by meeting new people.

"I meet the most interesting people," she said. In the beginning, I knew all my customers by name, but now it's grown so much I can't say that."

She tells about the woman who came and talked endlessly. Several times, Grace reminded the woman of her husband waiting in the car. The woman dismissed Grace's concern by saying, "Don't worry. My husband's an angel."

Hours later, the phone rang. It was the woman's husband who said, "When my wife is ready to come home, call me."

Grace chuckles, "Around here it never gets boring."

Classes are by appointment at their shop, 11 W. Lexington Road, Lititz, 17543; (717) 626-6405. The shop opened every day but Sunday at Roots Market in Manheim.

Homestead Notes