

## Susquehanna Valley Artisans Plan Holiday Tour

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HALLAM (York Co.) — Making a basket changed Deb Roberson's life.

Ten years ago, the then executive secretary was invited by a visiting relative to learn to make a basket. Five tedious hours later, she finished her first small, woven creation.

"Four months later, I quit my job to go to full-time basketmaking. I was hooked," she says with a smile.

Deb's basketry business, "Another Choice," will be one of 14 professional craftspersons hosting open houses in November during the first Susquehanna Valley Artisan's Holiday Studio Tour. Her 505 East Market Street shop in Hallam will also display the handwoven textiles of weaver Thomas Knisely and kaleidoscopes crafted by Mick Musser.

The tour, which runs all four November weekends, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturdays & Sundays, including the Friday after Thanksgiving, evolved through open houses which several of the participating artisans have independently hosted in previous years. Rather than schedule them randomly, a group of four, with Deb as secretary, began organizing in January to host concurrent open houses. They broadened the tour, by inviting other artisans whose work they knew, to include a selective variety of fine crafts. By naming themselves the Susquehanna Valley Artisans, the core group has looked ahead to future inclusion of craftspersons from adjoining counties.

Many of the artisans will be demonstrating their skills to visitors during tour days, as well as having an ample selection of their crafts on hand for holiday shoppers. Getting an inventory ready for the November-long event has many of the crafters, like Deb Roberson, working overtime.

Other than the assistance she got to complete the first basket, Deb has never taken a class in her

craft. Instead, she studied volumes of antique books, experimenting with reproducing the baskets she found in pictures until the end results met her high-quality standards. Her designs range from classic market baskets to large, round hamper-size styles, many with intricate woven accents, ornately decorated handles, and matching lids.

Though she can make as many as 20 baskets in a full day in her studio, in recent years Deb has concentrated on fashioning fewer, but more creative, designs. One of her most popular styles with customers, however, continues to be the traditional feather basket, a deep, round style with a lid that slides up the handle, was used in earlier days for storing poultry feathers.

Other baskets at "Another Choice" are less traditional and even whimsical, like Deb's reproduction of woven poultry-carriers, resembling giant lanterns, and birdhouses with thatch-like roofs. Her rectangular, woven gift boxes with matching lids were designed when she needed a special container for a dozen, crafted roses.

"And don't ever give your mother a reject basket," she quips. "That's the one she'll take everywhere." One such basket Deb gave to her mother became a favorite of her parents for taking along on trips, a sort of picnic basket for snacks. Deb offered to replace it with a custom-made picnic basket she devised, which has woven holders at each end for beverage containers. The design has since become one of the estimated 115 different styles and sizes in her inventory.

"A lot of my designs are custom made to meet some specific need a customer has," Deb explains. "If you know what they want to use them for, you can devise and adapt." Sometimes these new and special ideas take some mental pondering before they come out the way she envisions.

"It's taken me as long as two years to get a basket 'right,'" she says, chuckling that she will get frustrated occasionally and toss the half-worked creation on a shelf for a while.

While traditional baskets of the Southcentral Pennsylvania region were crafted of oak, Deb uses reed and rattan, a product made from the climbing tropical palm tree. Handles are of hickory, ash or oak commercial stock, which she hand carves and notches to fit each individual basket.

Deb's husband, Jim, handles the dyeing of material for the basketry accent colors, using blends of commercial dyes which they mix, after experimenting for just the right shades. Most baskets are stained with an all-natural dye made from black walnuts, giving the finished product an antique, used patina.

Because she specializes in more time-consuming, special-design baskets, Deb limits her participation in craft shows to just a few annually which feature top-quality items. The farthest she travels to a show is Westerville, Ohio, where she has won best-of-show awards; she is also a regular participant in the noted local East Berlin Colonial Days.

Her eye-catching show booth is designed to look like a log cabin, with a porch where Deb weaves baskets while sitting in a rocker. Jim, who often accompanies her to the shows, is fond of putting a child in one of her large bushel baskets and picking it up by the handles, to demonstrate the strength of the flexible, resilient materials.

"People often think because they are flexible, baskets will break, but it's the flexibility of the materials that keeps them from breaking," she demonstrates, as she squeezes and stretches one of her large, round "bushel" baskets.

Just up and across the street from "Another Choice," another Susquehanna Artisans Tour host is hammering away on hard steel in his blacksmith shop.

At "Ye Olde Workshope," 420 E. Market Street, blacksmith Louie Frantz works full time at forging metal reproductions and his original designs.

Frantz's hand-forged wrought iron pieces range from fireplace sets to lamp stands, many designed after those created by his colonial-days predecessors.

During tour hours, Frantz will be demonstrating his blacksmithing skills.

Traditional 18th century gunsmithing will be shown at Cabin Creek Gun Shop, 50 West Beaver Street, where gunsmith Brad Emig crafts detailed reproductions of firearms. Emig's museum quality pieces are carefully researched for historic authenticity. In addition to his crafting of firearm reproductions, Emig also does repair and restoration of antique and contemporary muzzleloaders.

A fourth tour participant in Hallam is the A.B. Ulrich Tin Shop at 234 West Beaver Street. In business just a year, Axel Ulrich specializes in tinplate reproductions of practical and decorative items of yesteryear, as well as some design in copper. Among the tinware reproductions on display for his first tour will be four-handled candelabra, hurricane lanterns and olive oil pots, an item similar to the teakettle.

Other participating artisans in



Surrounding Deb Roberson are some of the more than 100 styles and sizes of baskets she hand crafts at her Hallam shop "Another Choice." The baskets are all made freehand, using no molds, so each has its own special characteristics.

and around York County include

- Second Wind Pottery, Jill Moodie-Pellegrino, Red Lion, stoneware, porcelain and terra cotta;

- Tracy Shue, Tangent Lines, York, jewelry, hand-knit sweaters and handmade paper items;

- Southwest Batik, Sue Hawkins, York, wallhangings depicting the Southwest heritage;

- Handweaving, Gloria Oldenburg, East Berlin, table linens, scarves, shawls;

- Ric-O-Che Stained Glass, Peggy Frantz, Jacobus, stained glass creations

- Paulette Flemmens Fine Art Studio, Glen Rock, oil paintings

- Olde Mill Cabinet Shoppe,

Carl and Bess Naylor, York, handcrafted reproduction American furniture;

- Elaine Sechrist Grahamslaw, heirloom sewing, York, children's clothing

- The Glass House, Ronald Dubbs, York, stained glass and Williamsburg reproductions.

Additional information and an advertising booklet for the Susquehanna Artisans Holiday Studio Tour, which includes a map locating participants, is available by writing Deb Roberson, 505-507 East Market Street, Hallam, PA, 17406, or calling one of the following numbers: (717) 755-8185, (717) 755-4797, (717) 246-2354, or 244-8877.

## Homestead Notes

### Luzerne Craft Show

LEHMAN (Luzerne Co.) — Arts at Hayfield will sponsor its sixth annual Christmas Craft show on Sunday, November 6, at Penn State Wilkes-Barre Campus, Lehman, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The "Homespun Christmas" boutique will feature handcrafted items for sale including holiday

decorations, wreaths, dolls, jewelry, furniture, clothing and much more. More than 80 artisans and crafters will participate.

The show is free and the public is invited.

For more information, call Penn State Wilkes-Barre at (717) 675-2171.



At Ye Olde Workshope, blacksmith Louie Frantz crafts wrought iron colonial reproductions and functional, durable designs like lampstands and fireplace sets. Frantz will demonstrate at his forge during the Susquehanna Artisans Holiday Studio Tour.