



Sara Jane Krall shows off two dresses that she is entering in state competition after winning at the Lebanon Area Fair. Since 1978, Sara has been entering her sewing projects at the Pennsylvania State Farm Show and winning ribbons every year.

Face Behind Those Blue Ribbons In Farm Show Smocking Competition

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LEBANON (Lebanon Co.)—If you are one of the crowd who admires the clothing display at the Pennsylvania Farm Show, you have probably "oohed and ahhed" over entries stitched by Sara Jane Krall.

Her entries include smocked dresses, blouses, ornaments and tailored suits. This Lebanon County farm wife has been entering her sewing projects since 1978. Every year, she picks up several third to first-place ribbons.

"I guess it's the competition that keeps me entering," Sara Jane said. "But it's no big deal if it doesn't place."

Her fine, precise stitching is often detailed with the time-consuming art of smocking.

"I always have at least one project going," Sara Jane said of her smocking that she does not only on dresses, blouses, nightgowns, and sweatshirts but also Christmas ornaments.

The ornaments are easily slipped into her purse so that she can work on them while waiting in the doctor's office or whenever she has a few extra minutes.



Even dolls are lucky enough to wear smocked dresses by blue-ribbon winner Sara Jane Krall.

The smocked ornaments in bell, ball, and drum shapes are given as gifts or used to decorated the family tree.

Sara Jane, wife of Arthur Krall, said that her sewing expertise is the result of necessity.

"When our sons were young, they needed slim clothing, but it wasn't sold in stores for boys at that time," she said.

In order to dress her sons in clothing that fit, she started sewing all their pants and some shirts.

Before that, she had sewn her own clothing after learning sewing skills in 4-H classes.

The Kralls had three sons and a daughter. That's when Sara Jane discovered the joy of smocking.

At first she marked the fabric by hand, "but now I do English smocking," she said.

This means that she has a machine that automatically pleats the fabric in preparation for smocking.

Although she taught herself smocking from reading a book, Sara Jane did take several extension courses in smocking and sewing after she completed several projects.

Sara Jane said that she was hesitant to enter competition in the beginning, fearing that her items weren't good enough.

In 1971, she began to enter the Lebanon Fair. After seven years of success there, she braved state competition and was pleased with the ribbons garnered.

"But I learned that there are big differences in judges. Sometimes an entry that I only got a third-place at the county fair will take a first-place at the Farm Show," she said.

Sometimes it works the other way. Sara Jane believes that the judging is more precise at the county level where more people serve as judges than at the state level where two judges cover many categories.

Although Sara Jane has won many ribbons over the years, her biggest surprise was in 1991 when she won best of show over all sewing categories during the Farm Show's anniversary year.

That year, like every year, Sara Jane had dropped off her entries at the Lebanon County Extension. County agents took along the

entries. The next day, home economist Alletta Schadler voiced concern that the child's smocked dress was lost. Sara Jane traveled to the Farm Show and looked through all the entries herself and was dismayed that it was missing. However, as she turned the corner at the end of the display she



Smocked ornaments such as this one decorates the Krall's holiday tree and that of other family members and friends.

noticed the dress with a best of show ribbon attached.

"That was a complete surprise. I never expected that," she said. "The dress hadn't even taken a first place at the county level."

Which just goes to show you can't second-guess judges. It's also a good reason for others to enter.

This year, Sara Jane expects to enter a tailored wool skirt and four smocked dresses.

"I always drop off my entries at the extension. If they wouldn't take the entries up and pick them up when the show's finished, I wouldn't bother to enter," she said.

The Kralls have five grandchildren, three of whom are granddaughters. Although the one is still young enough to wear dresses with her grandmother's smocking, two have joined 4-H and are entering their own sewing projects.

While smocking is typically considered something only girls wear, Sara Jane has a delightful pattern for little boys. It's a sweat shirt that has a smocked insert with trains on it.

In addition to girls dresses, she also does smocking in nightgowns and women's blouses.

(Turn to Page E15)

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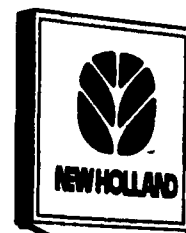
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