

Bishop Weaves A Love of Her Craft Into Every 4-H Basketry Project

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LIBERTY (Tioga Co.) — Marianne Bishop, a long-time 4-H leader, is always willing to give of her time to help teach young people new skills, and she couldn't be more proud of her students of basketry. In fact, one of her long-time students, Emily Norman, had her handmade picnic basket named "best of show" at last year's Pennsylvania Farm Show.

Emily's large oval basket features swing handles and a twill bottom. To win the "best of show" at the 2001 Farm Show, she not only competed against other baskets, but other crafts as well.

In 2002, other members plan to send their baskets, which have already earned awards at the Tioga County Fair, to the Farm Show to compete with arts and crafts from across Pennsylvania. Lori Mitstifer will show her Shaker cheese basket, Wendy Mitstifer will exhibit her twill basket and Renee Norman plans to send her carousel corn basket to be exhibited.

Bishop started learning about the art of basketry when she was young.

"I've always enjoyed baskets," said Bishop. "When I was quite small, a friend of my mother's gave me a little picnic basket. Later, my Dad learned how to make baskets at the Bucks County Historical Museum. When he died, my mother handed me his tools and said, 'Here, go learn how to make baskets.' So, my Mother made me do it!"

The first basket Bishop learned to make was a melon basket using two wooden hoops that are woven together with flat reed.

"I learned it through an extension program for homemakers," she said. "The second basket that I learned through that same program was the berry basket."

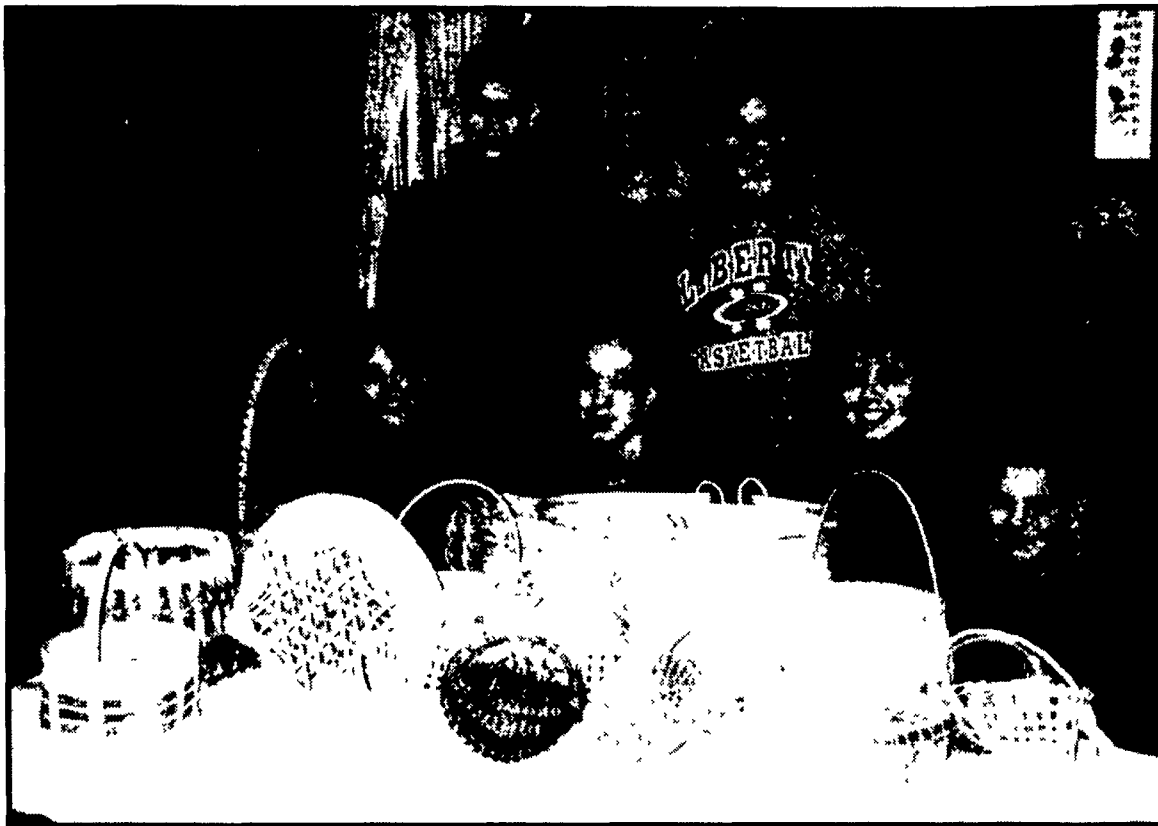
What began as a personal desire to learn the art of basketry has blossomed into a quest to discover more ways to develop the art form.

"At that time I was teaching at the Peace Valley Nature Center, and when the other girls saw the baskets, they wanted me to teach them. So I had to learn a new basket every month to keep ahead of them."

As of this past year, Bishop has helped her 4-H students with nine different styles of baskets.

In the first year, the students make a melon basket, just like the one that Bishop started with. The following year, they make a May basket and learn how to shape the sides of a basket by themselves, without the help of stabilizing hoops. The third year gets even more challenging as they form a berry basket.

"It's a trick to get the sides up



Members of the Liberty Community 4-H Club have been weaving baskets under the direction of Marianne Bishop for many years and have garnered many awards. Shown here are, from left, Renee Norman, Daren Hopkins, Lori Mitstifer, Wendy Mitstifer, Emily Norman, and Dane Hopkins.

so they're all even," said Emily Norman.

In the fourth year, the kids experiment with colored reed as they make a decorative star basket. Three different colors are outlined on paper with colored pencils.

"It was hard to make sure you had the design right as far as the color goes," said Renee Norman.

"You have to follow the pattern from a piece of paper. It's hard to see sometimes if the reed goes under or over," said Bishop.

The next step is making an apple basket. The bottom of the basket is formed with spokes and the finished basket is round in shape.

In year six, the students try their hand at making a coiled basket using long pine needles or straw. Lori Mitstifer chose to use rye straw to make her coiled basket. Although she admits it was a challenge to get it together, she thought using items that are available locally put a neat twist on the project.

"These are very difficult," said Bishop. "You have to hold the materials together while you pull the lashing around them."

After mastering the coiled basket, the 4-H'ers try their hand at a carousel corn basket.

"We made up the name of this basket because we copied a picture in a magazine," said Bishop.

The Shaker cheese basket is done the next year.

"That's a very challenging basket," said Bishop. "The Shakers actually lined them with cheese-

cloth. The Shakers learned that pattern from the American Indians, I think. I have books on Native Indian basketry and that pattern is in there."

Finally students attempt a twill basket which follows a very different pattern and has a characteristically flat bottom.

"Each year we try to have them learn something new," said Bishop of her students. "Toward the end we try to put some of these skills together."

As the 4-H'ers reach the upper levels of the project, Bishop often finds herself looking for new projects.

"One of these years, I hope to have some students cut their own wood and make a basket using wood splints," she said.

This past summer, Bishop guided the hands of 55 4-H members, many of them learning the craft for the very first time, others attempting to try a new basket. During the past 12 years she estimates that she has helped more than 70 different 4-H members learn her craft.

Seven of her students gathered at her home recently, each bringing some of their favorite baskets to show how each project has taken shape.

Ten-year-old Dane Hopkins is in his second year of taking the basket project in 4-H. He thought it would be fun to follow in the footsteps of older brother Daren. So far he has completed a melon basket and a May basket.

Making the baskets is rewarding in itself, but as part of the 4-H project they also need to keep track of their expenses and time investment. Most of the baskets can be completed in a day, but others take considerably more time. The bigger baskets might take several days.

"I spent a lot of time on this," said Emily Norman, who would like to add a lid to her creation.

Renee Norman agreed and noted that she has 20 hours invested in making her coiled basket.

"By the time the students reach their fifth or sixth year, they know how to handle the materials and they don't need somebody watching over them all the time," said Bishop.

Older students also are avail-

able to help the beginners.

Even though it takes a good deal of time, most students say the project is worth it.

"It's fun to see how they turn out," said Daren Hopkins who has completed several years of the project.

Bishop also volunteers her time teaching other groups the art of basketry. She has taught basketry at the Bucks County Association for the Blind, at senior centers, for church groups, newcomers groups, and others. She also sells some of her baskets at local craft fairs.

The learning that goes on when Bishop teaches a new skill to a group of 4-H'ers is often a two-way street.

"Some of the creative ones have taught me to go beyond...to reach and stretch and try something new. The carousel corn basket is probably one that I wouldn't have done with 4-H'ers, but they saw it and liked it. Then I had to go home and figure it out," she said.

They also learn to work with the materials that they have available to them.

No matter how fancy or big the baskets become, Bishop says her favorite is still the very first one that the kids make.

"When the kids come in, their mothers look at the basket and think that they can't do it. When the kids go home with the finished product, the parents are surprised and pleased, and I think the kids are too. It's the first one that they're doing and it looks difficult, but they do it." she said.



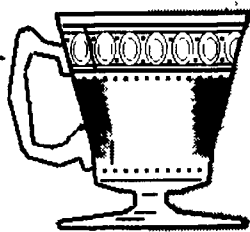
Marianne Bishop shows 10-year-old Dane Hopkins how to weave a new type of basket at her home.

Ephrata Cloister Offers Local History Class Beginning Jan. 31

EPHRATA (Lancaster Co.) — Have you ever heard of a horn-smith? Are you curious about the care of rare manuscripts? Did you know that some early bread bakers suffered from "baker's knees?"

If you ever have wondered about these and other parts of the past, the Winter History Class at the Ephrata Cloister is a program you would enjoy. This series of special lectures is presented each Thursday morning beginning Jan. 31 and continuing until March 21. Sessions are held in the Visitor Center at the Ephrata Cloister and begin at 9 a.m. and run until noon each day. The series concludes with a day-long field trip on April 4. Tuition for the series is \$25. Members of the Ephrata Cloister Associates receive a discount.

More information and registration materials can be obtained by calling the Ephrata Cloister at (717) 733-6600.



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