

'Revolutionaries' practice skills, crafts of colonial settlers

By GRACE R. DOVE
Post Staff

KINGSTON TOWNSHIP - Living in two centuries at once seems a bit confusing, but Sandy and Al Thomas of Bunker Hill have been doing it for the past three years.

As Colonial-era reenactors, they attend many Revolutionary War encampments, primitive mountain man rendezvous and muzzle loader shoots during the warm weather. They have meticulously researched their clothing, food, campsite and business to keep everything as authentic as possible.

Sandy owns Thread the Needle, a traveling shop which offers men's, women's and kids' clothing, which she designs and sews, using the Colonial tailor's main choices of cotton, wool or linen.

"I specialize in the 1750's to about 1800 - the time of the American Revolution and the French and Indian War," said Sandy, a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution. "It's my favorite historical period, possibly because I can trace my family back to that time. We had to learn the necessary skills to live as upper middle-class shopkeepers, who would have lived and travelled this way."

They must know all the necessary camp skills, the proper terms for things and keep up on their history in case campsite visitors

"For example, Karen (Sandy's sister, Karen Gillis) and I wanted

to crochet in camp, but couldn't do it until we had researched it," Sandy said. "While the word 'crochet' wasn't used until the 1820's, we learned that nuns made single-needle hooked lacework - crochet work - in 15th century Europe. Now we're documented and can do it."

While Sandy, her daughter Becky, and Karen, who makes beautiful quilts and rugs, tend the shop, Al, their son Joshua and Karen's son, Lyle "L.B." Schleve, fight in reenactments of major battles. Al, whose heritage includes Native American, often portrays a mountain man who has lived among the Indians, while Joshua is proud to have fought on the side of the Native Americans as an adopted son in the Battle of Wyoming reenactment this summer.

Al also makes comfortable collapsible camp benches and other items from wood and provides meat for the family during the hunting season.

The ladies have their share of fun too, competing in the many muzzle loader shoots found at rendezvous and reenactments.

Sandy brags she can outshoot Al and has won "a wonderful collection of blankets, a stool, a leather possibles bag and other prizes" to prove it.

A good shooting match, however, involves more than just plinking away at paper targets.

"One especially challenging match was a novelty match," she said. "We had to shoot at carrots,



POST PHOTO: GRACE R. DOVE

Kingston Township residents Lyle "L.B." Schleve, relatives Al, Sandy and Becky Thomas are Revolutionary War reenactors and compete in muzzle loader shoots. The owner of Thread the Needle, Sandy also designs, makes and sells Colonial era clothing, which she sells at reenactments.

balanced match sticks and animal silhouettes. The only target I missed was a small hanging strip of metal."

Sandy has been sewing nearly her entire life - everything from

dresses to coats and wedding gowns. "When I was little, I had the best-dressed dolls in the neighborhood," she said, laughing. "My Dad sewed a lot and made all the clothes for my youngest sister, Tammy, who wore large sizes."

Trained as a draftsman ("I love to draw," Sandy designed molds for a leading New York glass manufacturer when she was younger and later worked in a fabric store, sewing on the side.

"I never realized my training in drafting would eventually help me start my own sewing business," she said. "It happened accidentally - when I was looking for a

pattern one day, Al suggested I draw it myself. And everything took off from there."

Now that Joshua and Becky are older, she plans to also resume her artwork - drawing, painting, calligraphy and scrimshaw, which she has already put to good use making a beautiful powder horn.

Sandy and Al began reenacting three years ago at the Whispering Pines Rendezvous in Blossburg, near Mansfield.

"It rained so hard that we were knee-deep in water," Al said. Despite the weather, which can play

havoc with canvas tents and black powder, they were hooked.

They finished their first rendezvous weekend with a five-hour drive home in a van with a blown front end. "Our mechanic said we shouldn't have had any steering and should never have made it home," Sandy said. "When I think of how bad it was and that we're still here - God must have been watching over us."

Thread the Needle was born about the same time, when sev-

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Sandy Thomas
Kingston Twp.

eral mountain man friends asked Sandy to make them authentic shirts and pants. Soon Chuck Dixon, owner of the state's premier muzzle loader shop, began carrying a line of her clothing, making Thread the Needle the first and only clothier represented in his shows, held the last weekend in July.

Recently she was asked to research and design several outfits of men's and women's clothing from the Civil War era for a historical society.

"Reenacting is not play-acting. It's a way of life," Sandy said. "We live in our clothes for a good third of the year - they aren't just costumes. We leave our camp in better condition than when we came, as did our forebears, and have incorporated the Colonial values of honesty, keeping promises and a firm faith in our Creator into our daily life."

Quoting the Bible verse, "For He has given His angels charge over thee," she added, "He certainly has watched over us."

CHARMING BEAST

Kaylie Lumley took a close look at a miniature donkey during a visit a pair of the animals made to Westmoreland School Monday. Maxwell and Brewster came by as part of a first grade science unit about growing and changing. They'll return to Mrs. Philo's class so the students can observe how they grow over the course of the school year.

POST PHOTO: CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK



Bus driver

(continued from page 1)

to get the children to school on time, Balavage added, neither Myslinski nor her two children who were passengers in her car were injured, he said.

Of the 56 children riding the bus, 14 later complained of pain to the school principal and nurse, police said.

Transportation supervisor Susan Farr said Bellas followed all procedures "to the letter" except for leaving the scene of the accident before police arrived.

"Because he believed none of the children were injured, he felt his first priority was to get the children to school on time," Farr said. "This was a wrong judgement call on his part. Only one little girl fell to the floor. The others reported bumps or bruises to the school nurse."

None of the children were wearing seat belts because they aren't required in Pennsylvania, she added.

"The buses all have high, fairly well-padded seats and backs to

protect the children in accidents," Farr said. "If a child sits properly - facing forward with his or her feet on the floor - there's little chance of injury. These buses are well-designed to protect the kids, with reinforced frames and bodies."

All bus drivers receive copies of the procedures to follow in case of accidents and know them well, she said.

The police investigation is still open.

Lehman UM Women to meet Sept. 24

The Lehman United Methodist Women will host The Rev. Anita Ambrose at the first fall meeting at 7 p.m. on Sept. 24.

New feature begins this week

A regular column written by the Dallas High School guidance department begins in this issue. It will contain information about test dates, deadlines, college visitations and other activities conducted at the school. This week's column appears on page 11.

Lake Twp. to collect newsprint Sept. 21

Newspapers will be collected at the Lake Township drop-off center on Rte. 29 Sept. 21, 9 a.m.-11 a.m. Paper should be packed in paper bags and all glossy inserts removed.

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