



Sandra Choate, left, Betty Long-Schlieff and Beth Poirier look at some woven towels Beth made at Fiber Art Studio in Goldendale.

The Fiber of Friendship

Goldendale-area artists enjoy camaraderie of a shared work space

By Jeanie Senior

Creativity is the order of day at the Fiber Art Studio on Main Street in Goldendale, but laughter comes a close second.

Friends and fellow artists Betty Long-Schlieff and Beth Poirier opened the studio two years ago in one of downtown Goldendale's oldest buildings—a space belonging to Betty and her husband, Ken, that once housed their restaurant. Sandra Choate moved in a couple of months later. Now, it is retail shop as well as a studio.

The women engage in a variety of fiber art media. Beth is a longtime handweaver, Sandra's work ranges from using vintage textiles to create clothing to

whimsical soft toys. Betty experiments in several areas, such as custom-dyed cross-stitch fabric.

The women say their shared studio area fosters mutual support and creativity, and adds a strong element of fun to their work.

The trio dropped to a duet in January, when Beth moved her looms back to her home.

"I have such mixed feelings about leaving," says Beth, who occupied a storefront studio across the street in 2006 until she moved into the Fiber Art space. "I've loved being part of the group."

With Beth gone—and her looms, antique trunks, wooden ironing boards and other bric a brac, "we will have to look for our own wonderful props," Betty jokes, but sobered at the thought of Beth's

departure. “We’re pretty sad about this.”

“I am in total denial,” Sandra adds, half-seriously.

All three of the women are devotees of thrift stores and Goodwill’s “bins” outlets.

Sandra, who has hung rows of vintage aprons along a studio ceiling joist and filled a tall set of shelves with vintage textiles to be redesigned into fiber art projects, is an all-out collector.

“Every single place I go, I look for stuff,” she says.

Yields from her treasure-hunting: a rack of vintage Scandinavian sweaters, for sale at the studio, and a table of vintage “found” items.

Sandra and Betty’s enthusiasms are multiple and diverse. The vividly beautiful scarves that Betty has collected on trips to Canada provide swaths of color on a couple of walls.

One of the benefits of the shared space is a comprehensive library of books on subjects ranging from vintage textiles to decorative fiber arts. They also have scheduled what they call “play days” where they experiment with new techniques and media they have never worked with before, Sandra says.

They recently tried making gelatin prints, and although each used the same technique, “we all turned out something completely different,” Sandra says. “It’s so great.”

“We take play very seriously,” Beth adds.

Each has defined studio space, but there are no walls between them. Betty, who retired last year as registrar and director of collections at Maryhill Museum, has been custom dyeing, making one-of-a-kind clothes for American Girl dolls, unique luggage tags, fabric flowers and more.

Sandra, whose past jobs included working as costume director for an opera company, makes whimsical dolls—sock monkeys and mermaids—as well as aprons and girl’s dresses made from vintage textiles.

“I like the surprise element in art,” Sandra says.

She also started making Memory Bears, which she calls “a wonderful way to remember your loved one.”

The bears are made from special fabric—a blanket or a shirt or other item of clothing—stuffed with bamboo or poly fiber. The bears are guaranteed huggable, “made with much love and care.”

Betty, with the freedom to explore where she wants to focus, says she finds inspiration just from being part of the studio.

“It’s just a blast,” she says. ■

Fiber Art Studio, 118 Main St., is open Wednesdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., other days by chance or appointment. Call (509) 773-4514.



Betty sews a fabric flower. Above and below, some of Sandra’s creations: Raggedy Ann and a collection of sock monkeys.

