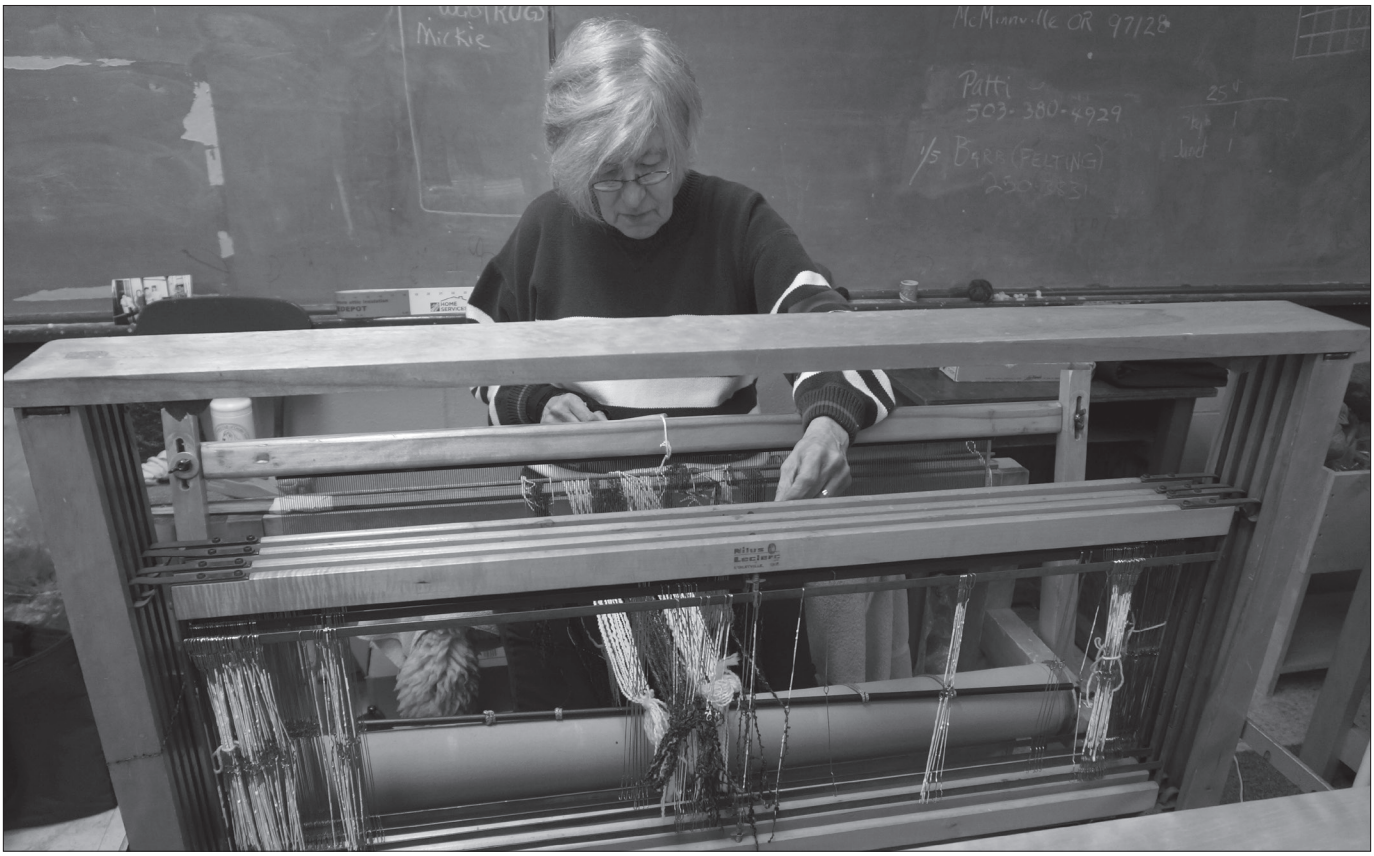

Bowman Creek Fiber Guild member Stephanie Gonyeau warps her loom in preparation for weaving. She has been weaving for 16 years.

Fiber Guild Offers Creative Workspace

Weavers and spinners are welcome at the Bowman Creek Fiber Guild in Goldendale

By Jeanie Senior

Looms of all sizes crowd the basement room in the old Goldendale Grange Hall where the Bowman Creek Fiber Guild meets every Thursday. It is a space well stocked with related paraphernalia, including spinning wheels, yarn, a drum carder, books and weaving samples.

On a recent Thursday morning, longtime member Patricia Horn was one of four guild members there. She started with knitting, then turned to spinning. Stephanie Gonyeau threaded her floor loom as Carol McKinney and Janice Christiansen were spinning. They talked quietly as they worked.

The guild has met at the Grange for at least 20 years.

"They used to meet in each other's houses well before I came on board," Patricia says. With the move to the Grange Hall, "there's always been a grange member in the group."

Guild members are more than spinners and weavers. Fiber is an inclusive term, Patricia says. Several of them quilt, do needlework or pursue other fiber-based crafts.

Janice has been a spinner since the 1980s, but also quilts, knits, crochets and felts. She used to do tatting. She used an Indian spindle early on.

"Nobody told me how hard it was," Janice says.

Then she got a spinning wheel, and that was a battle, too.

"At the end of the day, I was ready to throw it out the window," Janice says. But that night, she dreamed about the concept of spinning. In the morning, "I just got up and did it."

Janice holds up a length of the fiber she is spinning into yarn—a soft-as-a-kitten blend of merino wool, baby camel hair, silk and alpaca. She says she probably will crochet the wool into a shawl.

Janice and Carol are working on spinning wheels made in New Zealand. Carol says she has bought spinning wheels at auctions, thrift stores and estate sales.

Clockwise from above, Janice Christiansen says her spinning wheel's upright design makes it easy to move. Patricia Horn plies yarn at her wheel as she twists two strands together for strength. Janice, left, and Carol McKinney spin.

"Most of us have wheels here and at home as well," she says.

Patricia, whose wheel is Dutch, says many in the group have multiple wheels.

"Some of us are more collectors," she admits, smiling. "We're all halfway ashamed of it, but we keep doing it."

Carol collects sewing machines made pre-1970, when the machines' working parts were metal instead of plastic. She has a vast assortment, including one made at the end of the 19th century.

Carol started as a weaver a long time ago, first working on a Navajo-style rug loom her husband built. She recently learned to spin.

"I want to get really good at spinning," she says. "I'm getting so that I spin faster and faster."

Stephanie, a weaver for 16 years, uses a Canadian-built loom she bought at the University of Oregon for $40.

Goldendale's fiber guild is one of dozens of spinning and weaving guilds in Washington state, and just one of many in the U.S. and around the world. There are fiber fairs each year in Washington and Oregon, including one set for this fall in The Dalles.

The Bowman Creek Fiber Guild is open to all weavers and spinners, or those who hope to learn. Membership is $15 a month for weavers and $5 a month for spinners. The dues go toward rent and funded the purchase of a copier and printer so members can share patterns.

Guild meetings are 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Patricia says anyone interested in fiber arts can probably get some tutelage from the group.

"If someone wanders in we welcome them and let them set their own pace," she says, adding that spinning "tends to be a very pacifying thing to do. You might go in the morning a little jangled in your nerves—a little excess caffeine maybe. You sit there and pretty soon you're in the groove. It's really mellow. I highly recommend spinning. For me, it's just a quiet place." ■