

Saturday Market craftspersons face post-holiday inertia problem

By NICK GALLO
Of the Emerald

Portrait of the Saturday Market artist as a bank teller? A tree-planter? Hawaii tourist with a camera and lei and one of those crazy floral print shirts?

Christmas is more than the usual swirl of turbulence for market craftspersons. Some start jamming for that wild, frenzied finale as far back as August. But when it's all over, when the post-holiday catatonia sets in, what's a craftsperson to do?

"Probably starve," laughed Dennis Werst, a silversmith who arrived recently in Eugene and is working the fairs. "If I do all right, I'd like to get into more creative forms of working with a combination of wood and gems."

But craftspersons are unlikely to starve. The market has come a long way since the days when structures were illegal and there was one sole jeweler with a handful of rings in an egg carton. The crafts mania could be peaking this year. In a town where potters may outnumber loggers, the glut of fairs serve to feed private fantasy (... let's see now, when I get rich I'm going to ...)

"Everybody expects to get rich during Christmas season," explains Jack Pickett, a leather worker, "but they never do."

Pickett, a three-year veteran of the market, wonders what it would take to pack the market's craftspersons on a train, something like the Freedom Train which passed through the area this year, and point it toward those glorious untapped markets in the East where everyone, of course, is filthy rich.

"But I'll probably end up trimming trees in the rain," Pickett adds, his eyes still twinkling.

And then there's the two quilt-makers who will plant trees this winter and the guy who makes ceramic drums who will probably bus dishes. The woman in the black leotard top and silver scarf has a plane ticket to Hawaii.

"I know guys who bag sacks of grain all winter long," says Michael Murphy, who has abandoned the market to do the week-long fairs throughout the Northwest. "I had someone making jewelry with me who was a bank teller."

"There's a lot of Saturday artists here," says Murphy, "which is fine," he is quick to add. "But a true craftsman is a person who makes his living by his craft."



Emerald photo
These musicians are among the many craftspersons from the Saturday Market who look for alternative means of surviving. Some bag sacks of grain, some return to art for art's sake — and some starve.

And then there's always those who would like to crawl inside a driftboat and wait for steelhead all winter long. But for Ken Warner, one of the market's "Horatio Algiers" this year, it's back to the drawing board. Warner had been married to an hourly job at a Roseburg plywood mill when he and his wife, who quit her receptionist job, decided to make back packs. The two are storming the area, but Warner wants to take some time off to design some special equipment like the request for a pack that would fit a St. Bernard.

There are those, too, who will abandon crafts for a few months to go back to their first love: art for art's sake.

Michael Caffrey wants to paint. "I don't care to paint to sell," he says. "I'd rather do functional crafts here and then paint for myself. But I've been saying that for two years now."

Murphy concurs when he says,

"Jewelry puts four squares on the table and buys shoes for my kids. I enjoy it. I don't love jewelry, but I enjoy it."

And last but not least is the potter who had company for dinner last week and ran short of dishes.

That's right, she'll be making dishes in the afterglow of the holidays.

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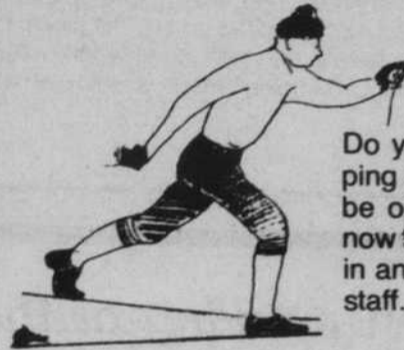
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