

I love it when people follow their dreams. Marilyn Watts and Carol Wright's dreams involved owning their own business and making stuff—good stuff—out of wood. They call themselves the Adirondykes, a name inspired by the Adirondack chairs they make.

Wright had not always lived her dreams. The Portland native got married right out of college.

"I attended George Fox College in preparation to be a teacher," she says, relating her earlier days as if they were from another life. "After I got my degree, I joined the faculty of GFC and worked as a career counselor."

In 1981 Wright became disabled and quit working, so she filled her time raising her two children and doing volunteer work. She came out as a lesbian in 1990 and finalized her divorce in 1995 after 23 years of marriage.

Watts grew up in Hillsboro on a nut farm. "My family raised filberts and prunes. Maybe that's why I turned out to be such an earthy, homegrown kind of woman," she laughs.

After high school she attended Oregon State University, majoring in agricultural education. She then took a year off to be an exchange student in Germany and Australia.

"That trip infected me terribly with the travel bug," Watts says. "So, after college, I joined the Peace Corps and went to Honduras

Four hands make great work

Lesbian couple build their home
and business from the ground up

BY HERON

"In '94, I started the coming-out process. In '95, I told my mom," Watts reveals. "That's how you know you are really out, right?"

Watts met Wright in 1995, then they bought a house in Oregon City, which led to a blessing ceremony in 1997. "It was a wonderful ceremony at Leech Botanical Garden," she notes. "We invited 125 of our closest friends," Wright adds with a chuckle.

Watts turned out to be quite handy, building and fixing things around their house. For her partner's 45th birthday, she made an Adirondack chair from a pattern she found at HomeBase. Their friends admired it and begged her to make furniture for them.

And that's how their dream began to come true. Watts enjoyed making the chairs, and the business started to take on a life of its own.

Next they converted their garage into a little shop. The couple created their own designs and played with many variations of chairs but soon ran out of space.

That's when they hooked up with the Trillium Artisans program thanks to Watts' Peace Corps connections. The grassroots organization was launched by a group of outer Southeast Portland neighbors to promote the economic empowerment of women through meaningful

work using recycled and reclaimed materials. It provides training, materials acquisition and product design support.

"They helped us with marketing and arranged wholesale connections," Wright says. "We went to fairs, Saturday Market, craft shows."

That first chair was made out of redwood, but the women found it too expensive and difficult to acquire. They soon switched to cedar and fir.

"We use all the reclaimed woods we can, and we're great scavengers. We scope out ads

and rummage through garage sales," Wright reveals.

Besides the full-size chairs, the Adirondykes make kid-sized versions as well as small boxes, card holders and plumb bobs. They also fashion key holders and holiday ornaments, often using scraps of sustainably harvested cherry. "The small things are made from hardwood scraps we get from local furniture manufacturers," Wright explains, showing off a beautiful, precision-crafted fountain pen made of exotic purpleheart.

As the business continued to grow, the couple realized they needed still more space. They had bought property as an investment on the Long Beach, Wash., peninsula in 1996 and decided it was time to move there.

"It was a big leap for us," Wright says. "Huge," Watts agrees.

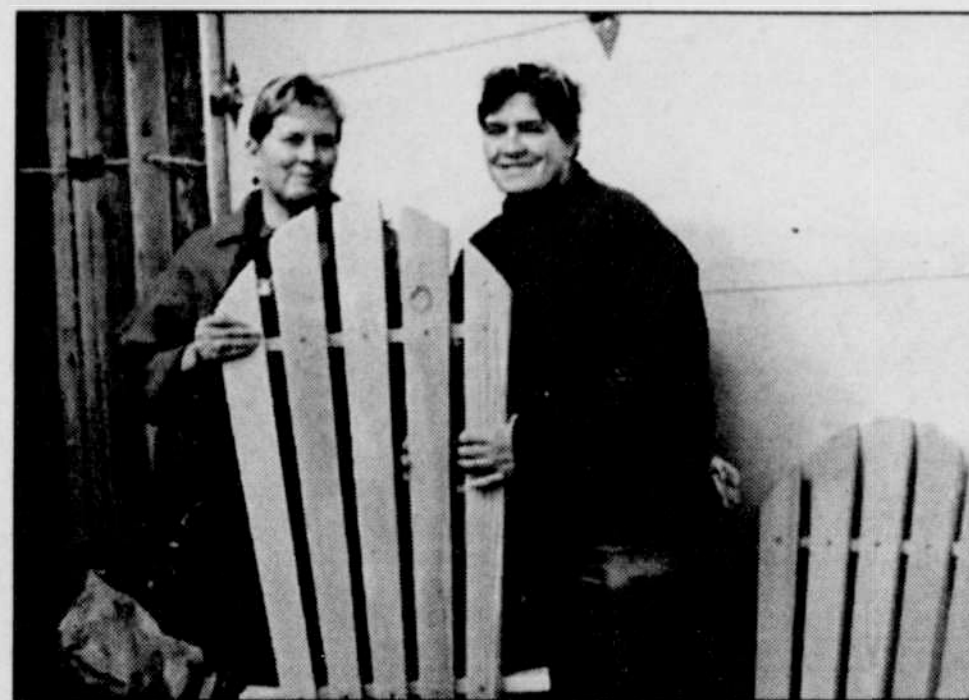
The couple built a house and a wood-working shop and migrated northward two years ago. With the move, each woman has found her niche.

"My job is marketing," says Wright, 50. "I'm also the creative side. I say, 'Why don't we try this on the lathe?' and Marilyn engineers it. I do get my hands dirty once in a while and turn a pen or two."

Watts, 39, is "the hands-on one." Now that they live in a remote area she makes more of the smaller things that can be shipped easily. They still deliver the larger pieces in southwest Washington and northwest Oregon. "It costs too much to put a chair in the mail," she says, laughing.

The couple have lived in Oyster-ville for two years now and have settled into their life in the quaint town.

"You can never be bored. It's beautiful there. You're either looking out at Willapa Bay or out at the ocean," exclaims Wright, who also finds time



The Adirondykes and their namesakes

for poetry and other writing. "We are both working partners and life partners. It's great—a real strength to our relationship."

The couple supplement their business income by working at Oysterville Sea Farms. "Our mutual goal is to be self-sustaining in the wood business," Wright says.

Recently, a woman who received one of Watts' pens as a gift called Trillium to say she used it to sign the purchase papers on her first home. Such are the special rewards of creating your livelihood with your own two—make that four—hands. **J**

The ADIRONDYKES are online at www.adirondyke.com and www.trilliumartisans.org. You also can see their wooden treasures at Trillium Artisans, 9119 S.E. Foster Road.

HERON is a Portland free-lance writer and artist who also has a love affair with wood.



Marilyn Watts turning wood into art

for two years. I worked with women's groups, doing vegetable gardening projects. It was incredible. I've never regretted it."

At the end of her Peace Corps stint, Watts traveled in South America, then returned to Portland. Once she got over the culture shock, she knew she needed a "real job."

"I went back to school and finished getting my teaching credentials," she says. Hired by Portland Public Schools, Watts taught horticulture for 12 years.



Carol Wright and her very butch drill press

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