



A new gallery opens up in Rhododendron

Wy'East Artisans

A group of artists and craftspersons living in Mt. Hood communities are testing the philosophy of the German writer, Johann Wolfgang Goethe.

Goethe, offering poetic advice to dreamers of dreams, wrote in "Faust": "Whatever you can be, or dream you can, begin it - boldness has genius, power and magic in it."

The Wy'East Artisans Guild was only a dream in the minds of a few mountain-area craftspersons last summer; but those few, unwittingly following Goethe's counsel, plunged boldly into forming an arts and crafts association.

The first meeting was held last August. Now 40-some members are gearing up to open their own gallery this weekend in Rhododendron.

"It's only been six months, and already we've done much more than we originally planned," said Bethany Dalton, member of the guild and chairman of the gallery.

Dalton said the rapid growth of the organization indicates that the guild was badly needed on the mountain. "We have so many artists up here, and some of them are really accomplished," she explained.

The guild was formed, according to its chairman, Phid Simons of Brightwood, to bring together artists and craftspersons on the mountain for personal and artistic growth.

The founders hope to promote among members "the highest standards of excellence", according to the guild's constitution, and to sponsor or locate

markets for the products that resulted.

Those products include pottery, stained glass, batik, jewelry, woodcarvings, quilts, photography, paintings, weavings and all the fiber arts.

Some of the craftspeople involved are beginners and hobbyists; others are experienced enough to be earning their livelihood by selling their work. Simons and Connie Westly are at that point.

Westly is a potter from Wisconsin who has lived in Brightwood for three years. She learned ceramics in art school after earning a degree in marketing. Before leaving Wisconsin, she was "just at the point of earning my living with my pottery - just getting to be a studio potter," she said.

After moving to Brightwood, Westly lost about a year's time, she said, while she set up a studio in her home and gave birth to her daughter, now two.

"I was feeling very isolated and frustrated," before the guild was established, she said. She was selling her work through only one outlet, the Weigh Station in Sandy.

Now she frequently receives orders for her pottery and is confident she will earn a "significant" income. She described one commission which came to her when a restaurant owner asked another guild member for sources of hand-made dinnerware.

The member referred the restaurant owner to Westly and to another potter, also in the guild, and the restaurateur placed an order with each.

"I think that demonstrates how supportive we are of each other," Westly

said. "We are not competitive. This is not a dog-eat-dog atmosphere."

Simons is also at the point of relying wholly on her craft, which is weaving, for her income. Before moving to the mountain area in 1979, she worked as a policy analyst for the state of Michigan.

"But I got fed up with the bureaucracy," she said, and since living in Brightwood has supported herself with jobs such as cooking and a temporary stint as director of a foreign student program in Mexico.

It was just this winter that she decided not to work elsewhere and concentrate on her weaving. She credits the guild with giving her motivation to make the decision.

"When I didn't have a good market, it wasn't as satisfying to weave," she said. "It was a lot of trouble to pack everything up and go to crafts fairs. The thought of having the gallery really inspired me."

Simons works on an eight-harness floor loom in her living room, but she says her specialty may be work that is produced on a small portable loom used by Indian women in Mexico and Central America.

"There are a lot of weavers out there who can do (common weaves such as) twills and overshots," she said, but very few who know the art of Tarascan lace weaving.

Simons learned to produce the delicate textile on the backstrap loom during her stay near a settlement of

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story, photos by Kaye Barton Bakke



Phid Simons (top left) is chairman of the Wy'East Artisans Guild and an accomplished weaver. She demonstrates the technique of weaving on a portable loom used by Indians in Mexico and Central America. Guild members also created the multi-media sign (top right) to identify booths at craft fairs. Connie Westly (bottom right) is a Brightwood potter who expects to earn a significant income through the guild and writer Mariah Martin practices her hobby, oil painting (bottom left).