

Suburban Life

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Today's easy care fabric creates resurgent market for old English opulence

Betty Jarvis fell in love with lace curtains when she visited her husband's family in Great Britain. That love affair has ended to bring about the Lace Curtain Shop in downtown Farmington, one of only a few such shops in the United States and the only one of its kind in the Midwest.

The Lace Curtain Shop has been open for less than a year, and Jarvis credits timing as the one element that has made her first business venture a success. It has clients from as far away as Alaska and Texas.

"I no more than opened when every decorating magazine you picked up was featuring lace," she said. "The product has been around since long before grandmother's time, but the resurgent market is new."

"THAT'S BEEN a big boost for me. The only trouble I've had is in convincing clients that all that I'm telling them is not too good to be true."

"A few months ago, I ran an ad stating that you could cover a seven-foot-wide window with a lace curtain for \$19.95, and I couldn't tell you the number of people who called asking if I knew there was a misprint."

"When I tell them you can literally custom-fit your own windows with no experience whatsoever as a seamstress, I can read the disbelief in their faces."

JARVIS BELIEVES that the stretching and starching once necessary to maintain a lace collar is one cause of the disbelief.

"They are all machine washable and machine dryable now. And it really is a simple do-it-yourself process."

The lace, all imported from Great Britain, is sold by the width yard. One side of the material contains a rod pocket. The other side has a finished edge, some straight, some scalloped, some with intricate edging that, when hung, is the bottom of the curtain.

When cut with a sharp pair of scissors, the material seals itself.

"THAT, COMBINED with the fact that you really can cover your window

with lace for about a third of the cost, or less, of ready-made sheers is what adds up to almost too-good-to-be-true.

"Add to that remnants — some of them large enough for small windows — are marked to one-half off."

Customers also have bought the self-seal lace to make tablecloths, place mats, collars, evening vests or jackets. Jarvis made one jacket that required two seams. One of her customers made a lace collar out of a dolly. It required no sewing at all.

Other customers are attracted to squares of lace with scenes, all of a very British nature, that can be mounted for wall hangings.

JARVIS IS an antique collector and a long-time admirer of lace whose admiration grew as she saw its many uses in England.

"Tiny cottages, really very modest homes, all had magnificent windows, which made me realize that lace had to be affordable."

"Five-hundred-year-old looms in English factories still produce the same delicate laces as they have through the centuries. The switch today to polyester fiber is what has revitalized the market."

"Another factor is the variety of patterns made that run from the Victorian to very modern, which is attracting a cross section of home decorators."

CENTURIES AGO, children as young as 3 were trained as craftsmen. Because of the techniques used, they usually were blind by age 13, she said.

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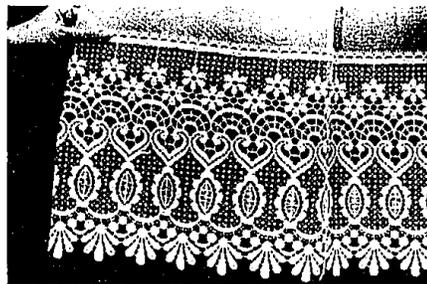
"They used a magnifying glass and had a bowl of water under their work to reflect the sunlight. When I saw examples of their work under magnification in the British Museum, I winced at the ignorance which caused those little eyes to burn."

During the Victorian era, when the lace curtain was a mark of opulence, entire days were devoted to rinsing lace panels in thick starch. That was followed with the tedious chore of fastening each piece to spiny curtain stretchers.

"That alone would be enough to fade any fashion. I do some hand-made lace, and I do some crocheting, and once in a while I will get requests for hand-made pieces, but it's all too precious to sell."

"Only occasionally will I part with it as a love gift."

Lace curtain hems come plain or fancy such as the one shown at right. The vertical edges of the curtain seal themselves when cut with an ordinary pair of sewing shears.



RANDY BORST/Staff photographer



Surprise!

A birthday party is planned for a grand old dame who is 15 years old

By Lorraine McClellan
staff writer

Plans for a surprise birthday party are under way to celebrate Farmington Community Center's 15th anniversary the week of Feb. 3-9.

Lapel buttons reading "15 and Fabulous" that will be worn about town before the year is out will herald a week full of surprises being prepared in ob-

servance of the time the house and grounds on Farmington Road has served as a central meeting spot for area residents.

"She's a grand old dame and she deserves a party," said Barb Nolan, who is working with Ann Riley to map out tentative party plans. "We're going to treat her like the beautiful lady that she is."

Nolan and Riley both became involved with the center through their affiliation with Professional Women's Network, which was initiated by the center and uses the center as a meeting place.

The network, along with the center's Volunteer Guild, gives the co-chairpersons a host of talent and built-in manpower to carry out whatever plans they

have, but Riley welcomes suggestions and help from all corners.

"We've got a list of activities that reads like a something-for-everyone list, and it is all geared to bringing the community center exposure," Riley said. "It is all aimed to getting more people, of all ages, coming to the center and realizing the center is much more than a place to go to take a Yoga class. So we welcome help and sugges-

tions and involvement from every resident."

THE TWO ARE off to a good start, at least on that befall.

They have already gotten the support of such diverse groups as one Boy Scout Troop, the Farmington Tennis Club and Oakland Community College's food services department which is donating the services of an ice sculptor.

Plans now call for a seven-day open house with at least one major activity going on every day.

"But we could have two a day. Or what we have outlined could be expanded or changed by whoever wants to take charge of one particular activity. And depending on the weather, we might need back-ups, sort of a plan B that goes into operation," Nolan said.

She gave the example of a proposed treasure hunt on the center's grounds and a snowman-building contest.

"If the snow isn't co-operating we would expect that chairperson to be able to switch to building snow men out of paper mache in the building," she said.

But one of the definite is the surprise for anybody in the sister cities who is celebrating anything that is related to 15 years.

"You are a celebrant if you are celebrating 15 years of marriage, your company's 15th anniversary, the birth of a child 15 years ago, any excuse at all will do if it has to do with 15," Nolan said.

MANY OF THE suggested activities on the something-for-everybody list will be free. Many will have what is hoped to be a moderate charge cut down through contributions of time, talent and money. But at the end of the week, the co-chairs expect to be able to give the grand old dame a birthday gift.

"We've got a list of activities that reads like a something-for-everyone list, and it is all geared to bring the community center exposure. It is all aimed at getting more people of all ages coming to the center, and realizing the center is much more than a place to go to take a yoga lesson."

— Ann Riley

"We already think we know what it's going to be, but that too, will be a surprise," Riley said.

"We're doing this as a commitment to the center, because after all the center is committed to the community."

Riley is a group claim manager for Prudential Insurance Co. in Southfield. Nolan is manager of museum food services, Edison Institute, Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village.

The two ask to hear from area persons with any expertise that could be put to use in heading up a February activity for those of any age.

"We need know-how from anyone who will help us with anything from a fun run to a cheese-cake bake-off," Nolan said.

Interested persons are asked to leave a message with Farmington Community Center, 477-8404, which one of the two women will return.



It has been 15 years since the grand old mansion on Farmington Road turned community center, serving as a gathering place and providing educational, cultural and social programs for the resi-

dents. The Georgian-style home was built in 1879 and was designated as a State Historical Site in 1979 by Michigan Historical Commission.