

Sweet dreams

Baskets are converted to cozy and comfy beds for a favorite doll

By Mario McGee
staff writer

HUNDREDS OF "precious darlings" are going beddy-bye everyday in cushy surroundings befitting their whimsical state in life. And they owe it all to a lively 5-year-old girl with the rather magical name of Crystal.

It was Crystal who gave her mom the idea to turn baskets into cozy and comfy doll beds. What has emerged is the Sweet Dreams Doll Basket Co., headquartered in the Livonia home of Gwyl (the Welsh spelling for Jill) and Carl Wright.

In three years of existence, Sweet Dreams has woven a reputation far and wide for quality of design and workmanship.

IT ALL BEGAN several Christmases ago, when Crystal's great-grandmother sent the Wrights their gifts packaged in a basket.

Once the gifts were opened, then-2-year-old Crystal latched onto the empty basket and loaded it up with her own stuff — mostly doll paraphernalia.

That set her mom to thinking. As most mothers have noticed, Gwyl commented, "every little girl loves to carry things. When Crystal began carrying her stuff in that basket, it gave me the

idea for the first doll bed."

Up to that point, the Wrights were living in Chicago and Gwyl Wright spent her days as a homemaker who used her spare time sewing all her daughter's clothes and occasionally throwing in a sports jacket or two for her salesman husband.

A TRANSFER to Livonia and the opening of the doll-bed business were almost simultaneous.

Once here, Wright combined her sewing skills with organizational expertise she had gained working as an inside sales organizer for a manufacturer's representative before her marriage. She began by researching various companies that sell baskets. The first basket to be offered was named "Jillia." Others styles followed. All the basket beds are named after nieces and close friends.

The most popular is "Cassie" — probably because a Cabbage Patch kid fits in it perfectly. Crystal is quick to point out.

In the beginning, Gwyl had a partner, former neighbor Nancy Sallow of Plymouth, who has since dropped out of the venture.

TOGETHER THEY came up with a fairy-tale-type introduction that compares each basket bed. It's a magical story about a princess, a wizard with some magic dust and the promise that the princess and her doll will live happily ever after.

The first year saw the two women doing a fairly brisk business. "If we had a nickel for everyone who said the baskets were cute and how much they loved them, we'd have made a fortune," recalled Gwyl.

The second year — and dozens of craft shows later — business got better as more doll bed models were offered and the word got around about the company.

But this year, business is the best yet, possibly because of the addition of a gift basket, said Gwyl.

THAT BASKET holds a tablecloth and two or four napkins. Suggested additions are a bottle of wine and a couple of wine glasses.

Along the way, Gwyl has assembled a crew of part-time workers, mostly neighborhood high school students, who help with the assembling and packing of orders for places as far away as Hawaii.

Sewing of the bedding and decorative basket ties is done by her mother, Vivian Branch of Novi, where Gwyl grew up and attended high school. Business got so good that her mother quit her job as a receptionist to help out at Sweet Dreams, Gwyl said.

Her dad, a carpenter, does all the carpentry work on the doll beds that have rockers. Her brother, also a carpenter, helps with displays for the many craft shows the Wrights attend from June through November.

HER HUSBAND, Carl, a salesman for Panasonic, helps keep track of the inventory and does some basket tying when Gwyl gets behind schedule "which is almost all the time."

Sweet Dreams offers more than 15 models to choose from, including three life-size models for real babies. One of those is an elegant rocker model named Diana — after Lady You-Know-Who.

Sweet Dreams Doll Basket Co. can be reached by calling 591-3501.



JERRY ZOLYNSKY/Staff photographer

Crystal Wright, 5, and her mother, Gwyl, tuck in her Cabbage Patch Kid in the Cassie model, which is a perfect fit for CPKs.



retirement memos

Margaret Miller

It's not that easy to enter your 60s

It's a good thing my husband doesn't turn 60 every day. Once was almost too much for our almost-retired gray couple.

I remember making it through a 50th birthday with half-dollars taped everywhere I looked, and a 60th that brought a singing and dancing birthday cake to my desk at this newspaper. But that was before I retired.

And Joe's 60th natal day celebration last month started in a fairly untaxing manner. About mid-afternoon a messenger appeared at the door holding a dozen balloons tied with bright ribbons.

"I'm told these came from Anchorage," he said. We marveled at how they had made it across the Rockies, what with the snow storms and all, and we took some pictures to show daughter Ann that her remembrance had arrived.

THE HELIUM-FILLED balloons were gracing our ceiling when, before dinner, we tackled boxes that had arrived from daughters Barb and Kathy in Michigan. With them had come strict orders that neither box was to be opened until both were on hand.

First we found three refrigerator boxes of homemade cookies. They'd be delicious, we were sure. But after that all was puzzlement as we started on an assortment of small packages.

Joe opened first a package of small paper plates. Then a box of six flashlight batteries. Then a bag of balloons.

"They're sending a birthday party," we decided.

But then came a notebook. And a pad of paper. A small jigsaw puzzle. A card of bobby pins, a light bulb. Packages of baggies and freezer bags. And a couple of real brain-twisters, a box of Smart vitamins and a bottle of cod liver oil capsules. Health advice, maybe?

A cassette tape surfaced and we were sure it would provide an explanation. But we played it and it turned out to be an exercise tape.

STILL IN the dark, we turned to the presents I had wrapped for Joe. One was a small snorkle set. "I didn't know whether you'd like it," I told him, "but I had seen you look at it in the store."

Indeed he liked it, he said, and added: "It's certainly as useful as a 60-watt light bulb." And as he spoke we both realized what the odd assortment was all about. Sixty paper plates, 60 balloons, a 60-page notebook, a 60-piece puzzle, 60 bobby pins, 60 vitamins, 60 cod liver oil capsules, a 60-minute tape. Sixty cookies, we assumed, but didn't count.

The light had dawned just in time. The telephone rang, and granddaughter Katie was ready to sing "Happy Birthday" and Barb wanted to know how we like the 60s. "We decided not to put in any explanation," she said. "We thought we'd let you figure it out." Later Kathy was to note in another call that "you have no idea how few things are packaged in 60s."

We told Barb we supposed the flashlight batteries each represented 10 years. "No," she said, "they're six D batteries."

OK, kids, it was a great birthday party. We love the cookies and we'll use the bags and notebook and pad. But what will we ever do with all that cod liver oil?

Margaret Miller was Suburban Life editor for Observer Newspapers for 16 years. She and her husband Joe have retired to Florida, where she writes Retirement Memos. HG

around town

with Sharon Dargay

OLD WOMAN SHOWS

Thursday, Dec. 26: Betty Noreen exhibits her work in a one-woman show in Farmington Hills Branch Library, and Gladis McMillen has a one-woman show in Farmington Branch Library, through Dec. 31.

GED PREPARATION

Thursday, Dec. 26: Registrations are taken now for people wishing to prepare to take their GED (General Education Diploma) test from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. in Ten Mile Community School, 32789 10 Mile Road. Classes begin the week of Jan. 27. Inquiries are taken by calling the school, 474-5233.

PALS

Thursday, Dec. 26: Appointments are now being taken for the screening of potentially bright four-year-olds eligible for PALS, an enrichment program that begins Jan. 10 in Fairview Early Childhood Center. Appointments are made by calling the school, 626-8335.

NEW YEAR'S EVE

Tuesday, Dec. 31: New Year's Eve dinner dance sponsored by Groves-Walker American Legion, from 7 p.m. until 2 a.m. in the post, 31775 Grand River. Tickets are \$45 per couple. Reservations made by calling the post, 476-9174 after 2 p.m.

ADVENTURE GAMES

Thursday, Jan. 2: People interested in role playing adventure games are invited to join the gamers from 6 to 9 p.m. the first and third Thursday of every month in Farmington Branch Library, 23500 Liberty Street. Beginners are welcomed. No charge.

PALS ORIENTATION

Tuesday, Jan. 7: Orientation for all parents interested in PALS, an enrichment program for potentially bright four-year-olds, at 7:30 p.m. in Fairview Elementary School, located in Old Franklin Subdivision, east of Middlebelt Road, north of 13 Mile Road.

MUSICALE YOUTH

Wednesday, Jan. 8: Children of Farmington Musicales members, from 6-16 years, perform on piano, violin, saxophone, clarinet and sing in recital at 12:30 p.m. in Farmington Hills Branch Library, 12 Mile Road east of Farmington Road. Reservations are requested, and baby-sitting is available, by calling Janet Kidd, 553-3591.

Museum lists holiday hours

Greenmead, Livonia's Historical Museum and Village, will be open for the season from 1-4 p.m. each Saturday and Sunday in December. Guided tours are \$1 for adults, 25 cents for those from 10-18 years, and free for those under 10.

There is no charge for the musical programs which begin at 3:30 p.m. Sundays in Newburg Church on the grounds.

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