The Dollmaker

Farmington Hills retiree finds a hobby to wile away hours

BY DIANG GAIR ANDREASS

BYEIGH. WAITER

Dorothy Gala recently retired from her job and says now shell have time to play with her dolls.

The 69-year-old grandmether wiles away hours in the hasement of her Farmington Hills home scraping percelain arms and legs until their touch is softern than the same and sewing clothes until each doll hus a special, individual look. Like a carring mother fussing over her children, Gala's fingers rhythmically pat their checks and full their outfits.

Smiles, smirks and grins per heak at her from every corner of her work area. Eyes sparkle in every hue and size. Lips are puckered and colored. Expressions prompt conversations with these china people gathered together in Gala's own little village.

They come in all shades of cream and coffee. And they're in gloriously costumed brides in pearle, garters and even bustlen. Their clothes, hand-made by Gala, represent countries around the globe, including Scotland, Jamaica and Japan.

Some she sows and others she crechels.

Some she sows and others she crochets.

These little creations begin in a small hallway where Gala stores jars of liquid porcelain and molds for faces, arms and legs. She pours the liquid goo and when they are fired.

As if she were applying makeupon in the same with the same and lightly and the same and lightly and the same and blush for the cheeks and lightly and the same and lightly and li

them and date them, she said.

Gala has learned a lot of tricks
from other teachers and now
teaches students in her home.

"It's kind of like sharing," sold
Gala, who rotired as a clerk from
the Farmington Hills Police
Department four years ago. She
roturned on a temporary bosis
carlier this year and recently
ended that stint. She charges
bully \$5 for each class, as well as
fring and material fees.

"I don't do it for money. I've
mover met a person who likes
dolls who I didn't like," Gala
said. "One time I went to the
hospital for triple bypass aurgery
and they (her students) anid,
Who needs you? and they came
down here and worked on their
dolls."

down here and worked on their dolls."
Occasionally she works on repairs. And sometimes she takes orders, but the bulk of her work is for sale at craft shows, including the Farmington Area Founders Featival.

"Each doll is different and eventually, if they don't get broken or smashed, they will be antiques," she said. "I used to look at antique dolls and I couldn't afford them and I said: Well, I'll make therg."
Taking a ballerina off the shelf, Gala dusts off her hands.
"I think they get around and play at night because they get dirty," she said, with a smile and chuckle that come easily for her. "Sometimes I start talking to them."
The dancer is perched on a pedestal, dressed in a pink tutu and slippers Gala made herself. The price tag around her wrist is \$300.

"Trust me it decen't begin to

The price tag around her wrist is 3300.

"Trust me it doesn't begin to pay for the amount of work that goes into it," Gala said.

One of the mest popular dells is a life-size, sleoping baby with long lashes and the weight of a newborn priced at \$165.

Which dell is her most precious? "The next one that I make, she said.

A cluster of blue, first-place ribbons from the Michigan Doll Maker's Guild hang from the ceiling, but she isn't nure just how many there are. In naother corner, she pulle out a few trephies from the Greater-Detroit Hobby Ceramic and Doll Exposition.

tion.
Gala didn't start out making dolls to win awards or even to make money. She noeded some-

thing to divert her anguish from the deaths of a grandson in a car accident and her daughter, Linda, to cancer when she was 29 years old, leaving two children to Gala's care. She began making dolls in 1982 to help her through the grieving.

"The dolls keep me grounded," she said. "I start working on them and stop thinking about those things."

In nearly 20 years, Gala added, she can't "even begin to count how many' dolls ohe has made.

count how many "doll such has made.

The such that the procedual dolla, here and there about the room, stand an interest that the room stand mightier, eagl figurines, some in glase cases. These fine interest in the precision that galactic state the precision that data molds into various styles. Most of their dresses are accented with tiny hand-made porcelain roses and exquisite isvelry.

This is really something I love doing, "Gola acid, as we touches one figurine. "It's a very addictive hobby."

When she isn't making dolls or figurines, she also works on figurines, she also works on countries the countries of the countries of

"I've never met a person who likes dolls that I didn't like."

Dorothy Gala

clown faces, Christmas ornaments, angels and a wide assortment of designs.

With a hardy laugh, Gala talked about a trip she is planning river rathing and gambling in Las Vegas with her youngest daughter, Michelle.

"I did it once before and I want to do it again," she said, "I might take a helicopter ride and hopefully win a lot of money."

This year, however, Gala said she wasn't at the Founders Festival because she didn't have a lat of new dolls to show. Despite a room full of dolls, Gala said: I don't have anything new to show.

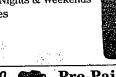


In her element: Dorothy Gala in her basement studio with the dolls she creates. She spends hours and hours on each porcelain doll, a true labor of love. The bulk of her work is for sale at craft shows, such as the Farmington Founders Festival.



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