

SLOCAN VALLEY THREADS GUILD



Hand-dyed yarn hangs in a snowy yard.
Photo courtesy Slocan Valley Threads Guild

Connecting threads for 40 years

by Margaret Tessman

This fall, the Slocan Valley Threads Guild is celebrating four decades of camaraderie, skill sharing and giving back to the community. Clearly, there's nothing like people with fibre addictions to keep an organization going for 40 years.

Anniversary committee members have made plans for festivities and ongoing projects:

- A display of member work and archival photos at the Nelson Library in October and November;
- A Zoom workshop with Sylvia Olsen, who is doing a virtual book tour in support of *Unravelling Canada: A Knitting Odyssey*, published in April 2021. Olsen is a well-known author and historian of Coast Salish Cowichan knitting techniques. In 2015 Olsen and

her partner Tex embarked on a 40-stop cross-country knitting-themed road trip to conduct workshops and exchange experiences with other knitters;

- A much-needed storage shed rebuild (we hear the old one's primarily fit for squirrels);
- Gathering stories and images from the past 40 years, supported by a grant from the Trust through the CKCA. The collection will be posted on the guild website, slocanvalleythreadsguild.wordpress.com;
- A Yarn and Yardage sale on Sunday, October 24, from 10 to 2. The sale will be held outdoors, (if COVID protocols allow) at the Threads Guild. Donated goods include raw wool, fabric, notions, books, trim and yarn, as well as perennial plants and baking.

The Threads Guild was incorporated as a society in 1981, but it began a decade earlier with crafters from the Slocan Valley coming together to share orders for materials. Interest and

membership outgrew living room meetings, so when a call for proposals was put out for a decommissioned one-room schoolhouse in Perry Siding, the crafters suggested a fibre arts centre.

“Having the building involved more of the community with renovations, classes and sharing ideas,” says Julie Davis, guild historian and one of the original members from the 1970s. “The guild just keeps growing.”

“We saved a heritage building through our efforts,” says Lesley Mayfield. “It was rebuilt from the foundation up, inside and out.”

Mayfield was already an accomplished fibre artist when she moved to the Slocan Valley in 1989. “I was making large wall hangings, a solitary activity,” she says. “I was not much of a joiner, but the Threads Guild seemed like a friendly bunch.” Mayfield credits the guild with expanding her knowledge and broadening her repertoire of skills. Instead of working solely with pre-made materials, she learned indigo dyeing and other applications that gave her more scope for creativity.

“I found it stimulating to realize how many people there were with an interest in fibre,” she says. “Membership is open to anyone who is working in their craft and taking it seriously and trying their best. It makes it worthwhile to carry on, and we’re

fulfilling a need people have in a rural area.” Typically, guild membership runs close to 100 individuals. Semi-regular Gab ‘n’ Jab meetings are an opportunity for members to bring along works in progress while sharing stories, songs and advice.

Guild president Val Mayes found the organization soon after moving to the Valley in 2007. “It’s a treasure. It became a source of friendship and skills. And with the long, grey winters in the Kootenays, the ability to get your hands in colour is important.”

Over the years, members have knit hundreds of baby hats, mastectomy prosthetics and produced knit and sewn goods for seasonal hampers. The guild website now features a Pandemic Project Page, where members can post photos of their work. “We couldn’t get together last year, but we’ve got over two hundred pictures of projects that people finished,” says Mayes.

“I think the guild is important because it brings value to the community,” says Mayfield. “People need venues to get together. We’re the equivalent of a sports team for crafts.

“Together we are felters, spinners, quilters, weavers, dyers, sewists, knitters, crocheters, rug hookers and basket-makers. The cross-fertilization of ideas and techniques is wonderful.”

Slocan Valley Threads Guild is located at 7112 Perry’s Back Road in Appledale. It’s a left turn off Highway 6, a few minutes north of Winlaw.