

Share Your Talents

By Sandy Atkinson

As Steve and I travel around this great country of ours to teach basket weaving and seat weaving, one thing we have noticed among the different conventions, workshops and gatherings, is the ages of our students and those who work on the workshops themselves. It's pretty obvious that most of us are growing a little gray around the temples.

I have talked to a lot of the participants, coordinators and teachers about this problem and we all agree that there is a huge need to get the younger generations involved with creating baskets if we are going to see a future for this art form.

When I first started teaching I was younger (or course) and also had many different ages in my classes. Now, several years later, that is not the situation. Most of those involved with baskets and seat weaving are older. When I have a "young" student or see younger coordinators I try to let them know how much they are appreciated and tell them to please share this interest with their friends and family.

So, how can we solve this problem? I have a few ideas to share that has worked for me. I advertise and let all know that we have classes here for anyone, mom & daughters-sons, fathers & daughters-sons, scouts, birthday parties, etc... I have kits for different age groups. I also do "family" and "friend" classes, for groups that want to come for the day. Don't forget your own kids and grandkids too, plan a day with them! Call your local schools, offer to come into the classroom and teach a basket class. For elementary classes, I like to do a two day class. The basket I teach for this age group is woven on a wood base. Class 1, I teach a simple painting class, letting the students choose how to "paint" their bases: solid color, stencil or free form of their own design. Class 2, we weave the basket. Prices for the kit are minimal so all can enjoy it. If a student cannot afford the class, usually \$4.00-5.00, then I will "pay" for the class myself, as I don't want to let any student miss the class.

A few years ago I was teaching a two day class in Arkansas for my granddaughter's elementary school. On day two when we were weaving, I was explaining to the students how important math was in our daily life. We use math every day for sewing, cooking, building-even with lego's and tinker toys, art projects and in making baskets. As I was talking math "up" to the students, in walks the school superintendant. I was so proud that she caught what I was saying. Just wanted to share how important you can be in the students learning process.

For Jr. high and high school, baskets fall under the art classes and these can be a 1-5 day class, as the classes are only about 50 minutes long. I will propose baskets for the students

and teacher to choose together or just the teacher. Keep the proposed baskets in the beginner to beginner ++ as these students will most likely never have made a basket. Keep your cost down for these classes also. I know, it's your time and kit cost, BUT this is a service and you are hoping to bring in the students, their moms and possibly their siblings and friends. In these classes you are not doing them to earn money, BUT to promote the art of basketry.

If you have a senior center in your area, you can offer classes to those older people. They love to have "special" classes. Take a proposal into the director of the center, including all the information about the classes you would like to set up.

In early summer, contact the 4-H in your area, offer to put on a class for 4-H kids and a parent, as they have an award for basketry during the county fairs.

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You may want to try a rehab / convalescence center in your area, too. I have never offered classes there, but that may be a good place to catch many people there who don't have the opportunity to take a class elsewhere and would love this art class while in rehab.

I remember many years ago at one state convention where people were not allowed to even peek into the large room where the classes were being taught. And if they would come back on Saturday, they could walk around BUT not disturb the classes – for a fee! I was very upset about all that, as how can we share if we try to hide what is happening at a basket convention???? Open the doors at these hotels and share basketry!! How can we get others involved if they want to talk to the attendees and perhaps the teacher. I will gladly share, talk about, encourage anyone interested in baskets. If a visitor wants to ask a question during the workshop, by all means answer them!! I'm not too busy to offer encouragement and most all the students in the class are excited and want to share too. Students love to have others "ooo" and "aww" over their baskets. I have never had a visitor disrupt a class nor would I expect them to disrupt a class.

I remember talking to a fellow weaver and she shared the idea of a "grandma camp". I love this idea of having the grandkids over for a day or a few days during the warmer months to share many things with them, including making a basket!! If you are up to it, have the kids bring a friend!!

If you don't already have a guild in your area, start one or support an existing one. We have

a great guild that is so in-tuned to our community, the Mid-Michigan Basket Makers Guild. We go to a children's cancer camp for one day in the summer to teach the children. They love the class we offer -free of charge! And they take home a basket they made to show off. We also demonstrate 2-5 times a summer at Cross Roads Village, which is a village put together in a neighboring city of antique homes, barns, blacksmith, printing shops, river boat, etc. We also teach there, using what we call our "starter" baskets. These are basket which we start the base and weave three rows up the sides. Young and old come to our table, finish the little baskets to take home. Yes, they feel they made that basket. We also hand out a card about the guild. Another thing we do is a FREE class, usually in March. We advertise the class many ways, including newspaper community page, local quilt guild, word of mouth, etc. We teach on a Saturday a simple basket and offer a lunch. This is all done free of charge to promote our guild and basketry. I'm sure you can come up with other ideas if you give it some thought.

One more sharing: I had a young lady walk into the studio with her mom and cousin just recently. She was so excited to see all the baskets on display along with kits and supplies that her enthusiasm flourished and spread to mom and cousin. Before they left, I had them all weaving!! Your love of baskets is easy to spread if you will just grab the opportunities when they come your way. Help to spread, share, encourage new weavers, especially the younger generations to love this art medium!