

# Fair more than animals; Tahoe craftspeople win awards

By Kathryn Reed

A long Tahoe winter might be responsible for the number of blue ribbons awarded at this year's El Dorado County Fair to people living in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Jonnie Crawford entered six items in the knitting category and came away with six ribbons.



Jonnie Crawford needs another board to hang her knitting ribbons.

Photos/Kathryn Reed

Jon Helman submitted two needle art pieces and was rewarded with two ribbons.

Though neither South Shore resident requires bad weather to work on their crafts, both admit a little more time was spent on projects this winter because indoor activities were more fun than outdoor on many days.

Everyone may see their handiwork at the fair, which starts

today and goes through Sunday. The entry fee for Tahoe residents has been reduced to \$2 each day.

Crawford is a veteran of winning – and knitting. She has been entering items in the local fair for more than a decade. Each year she has won something. The blue, red and white ribbons along with best of show fill a bulletin board in one room of her South Tahoe home. She learned to knit from her grandmother when she was in kindergarten, and has shared the hobby with her daughter and granddaughter.

Helman, a teacher at Sierra House Elementary School, started doing cross-stitch in 1989 – partly as a way to pass the time in winter. Pointing to how former Rams defensive lineman Rosey Grier picked up needlepoint as a way to calm his fear of flying, Helman said he is secure having a hobby that is not common for men.

Helman did not know he won two first-places until contacted by *Lake Tahoe News* this week. His best until now for needle art was third place. (With a friend, he has previously earned two seconds for winemaking.)

“I got a lot of sewing done this year with the miserable weather,” Helman said.

Half of his pieces are original, half come from a pattern.

“Some take a couple years to finish. They are real complex,” Helman said.

The one he just started has 66,100 stitches.

“It’s going to take a while,” Helman said.

This is the fifth year Crawford has been awarded best of show. Each class is judged and awarded first, second and third. Then all the first places are judged, with the winner being awarded best of show.



Jonnie  
Crawford  
designs knit  
fingerless  
gloves.

Crawford was in Placerville on June 10 for the judging. Even though she is a veteran competitor, she admits to having butterflies in her stomach as the judge inspects her work.

“She judges the inside and the outside,” Crawford said. “She looks to see if it is practical.”

This year Crawford received three firsts, two seconds, a third, and the best of show. She entered three sweaters, a pair of socks, a hat, and shawl.

She was shocked the socks won. She would have voted for the lace shawl.

A bookshelf in the Crawford living room is devoted to knitting books. Some patterns, though, are original. Her daughter designed the winning socks, while Crawford did the work.

Crawford and Helman share their work with friends and family. Much of Crawford’s husband and children’s wardrobes consists of her sweaters. For Helman, a unique gift to new parents is a birth announcement – in needlework.

While both would like to make some money off their creativity, the reality, they say, is it’s cost prohibitive.

Crawford said with the wool yarn manufactured in Norway and

Great Britain she orders online, plus labor a sweater may cost \$500.

Helman sold one of his pieces for \$400. He thinks he made \$1 an hour, plus matting and framing.

They create for the love it – and to pass the time during a long a Tahoe winter.

“It’s something to keep me sane,” Crawford said of her knitting.