

LIFESTYLE

Unique art gift of Lostant woman

By Shelby Sebens
NewsTribune Reporter

LOSTANT — Whether it's a colorful wire basket topped with animal bones or an intricate copper symbol from Italy, Suzanne Shafer-Wilson's artwork is unique.

"I'm just trying to do something that other people haven't done," Shafer-Wilson of Lostant said. She designs three-dimensional wire needle lace vessels.

The former art teacher and current western steel sign designer learned how to make needle lace at Northern Illinois University where she received a master's degree in fiber arts. Shafer-Wilson said when her mother handed her a plastic coated wire and said, "make something neat with these," she had found her niche.

Unlike anything done before, Shafer-Wilson takes lace designs and applies them to three-dimensional products made of everything from plastic wire to copper to animal fur.

"I've always been more three-dimensional oriented," Shafer-Wilson said, noting artists need to find a unique voice in order to stand out and be successful.

Her most recent work, all done by hand with wrenches and pliers, using copper wiring, is a slightly painful process. The

larger pieces must be worked on away from her two small children to avoid the risk of injury.

The disciplined work can be time consuming, taking six to eight hours to complete the



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Lace artist Suzanne Shafer-Wilson recently discussed her art (foreground) in her Lostant home. Shafer-Wilson will be part of an artisan showcase this weekend in Utica.

larger baskets that are used for storage or decoration.

"It's just like knitting, you have to count everything," Shafer-Wilson said.

A small copper replica of the "Symbol of Milano" hangs framed near the dining room table in Shafer-Wilson's home. That artwork, about six inches tall, took 35 hours to complete.

Shafer-Wilson said designing the small copper snake was frustrating because

pieces would become overworked and break. But it earned her an honorable mention from the Handweavers Guild of America.

The motivation to recreate the symbol through her own

creativity came from her trip to Milan, Italy, where she admired various lace designs.

Shafer-Wilson said her inspiration comes from a need to complete something every day, a desire she said many women share.

"I just feel the need to make things," Shafer-Wilson said, noting she once read that an unfinished product is nothing no matter how much time or hard work was put into it.

"I started finishing up everything that wasn't because I wanted it to be something," Shafer-Wilson said. "I don't want a house full of unfinished things."

Shafer-Wilson also derives inspiration from one of her favorite artists, Ed Rossbach. She follows his philosophy that ceramics and other art forms have rules that must be adhered to, but fiber is a medium without conditions.

"You can do anything you

want with any kind of materials," said Shafer-Wilson whose most unique piece is a large basket made from sticks, antlers and animal fur.

Shafer-Wilson's work will be showcased during the VIP Artisan Showcase, 5-8 p.m. today and 1-4 p.m. Saturday at August Hill Winery in Utica.

Customers will get a chance to meet with Shafer-Wilson and four other artists, said Teri Wenzel, co-owner of August Hill.

"We wanted to carry items in our taste room that are handmade and made out of passion," Wenzel said, noting much of the artwork has been on display for months.

Shafer-Wilson's art also is displayed at Illinois State Museum in Lockport.

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