



Finished May baskets sit at the Moreau Community Center as a group of 20 women make more.

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# Spring is in the basket

Local women enjoy art of creating May baskets for others

**S**OUTH GLENS FALLS — Peg Moody twisted light and dark purple crepe paper between her fingers and started forming the thin tissue into a flower.

Marge Watson pulled gently on dark purple crepe paper making petals form.

"I'm a twister," said Dee Aker, who sat next to them at the

Moreau Community Center. "I'm not a petaler. I don't do petals."

It only takes about 5 minutes to make a May basket from start to finish and the 20 women at the community center have mastered the process.

The tradition of May baskets can be traced historically to Great Britain, where the return of spring was celebrated with singing, dancing and an abundance of flowers. Although the quaint tradition is rarely practiced in the United States any-

more, the custom is blooming in South Glens Falls.

The May basket ladies have been making baskets for about 30 years and the center sells thousands of the hand-made flowering baskets as a fundraiser, making nearly \$4,000 last year. That's a lot of baskets, and the money is then donated to various community organizations and events.

The idea is to fill the basket with flowers or treats and leave it on someone's doorstep on May 1. The basket giver would ring the bell and run away.

Small baskets cost \$1, regular baskets cost \$1.50, and they also sell lace umbrellas for \$4.25.

Items can be purchased at the Moreau Community Center, local Stewart's shops, some local hair salons, and the women also set up shop outside both Walmart's, where they tend to chase the lightweight baskets through the windy parking lots.

Senior Program Director Jeanne Guthell grew up in the 1950s and remembers May Basket Day well. Students would bring boxes of them to school and she remembers seeing baskets sitting on doorsteps.

"It was like a secret gift in

celebration of May Day," she said.

Stewart's donated 1,200 milk cartons, which are cleaned out, cut up and covered in colorful crepe paper. It's a labor of love for these ladies, who have gathered at the community center once a week for two hours since the first Tuesday in January.

The assembly-line process is managed by Nancy Mونسour, who would be considered the foreman of this makeshift workshop.

The ladies also make tissue paper umbrellas covered in lace, a process that takes a special touch and skill.

"The umbrellas, they just fly," Mونسour said. "They just fly."

Demand for umbrellas and baskets is so high, the twisters and petalers can barely keep up. One year the group ran out of milk cartons and had people standing in line waiting for baskets, when a gentleman found some Pepsi soda cups in the basement.

"I tried it. I put it over on the counter to sell and the lady bought it right away," Watson said with a clap of her hands.

While the women enjoy the tradition, what they relish more is the company they keep while

making the May baskets. Visiting the community center gives seniors who may live alone a personal connection and a chance to brag about their grandchildren, said Kelly Obermayer, the director of development.

"That's the bigger piece. That's the community piece," Obermayer said. "That's the hook that brings people in."

That social connection is important to Moody, who remembers making May baskets as a kid, but using DeLong's Dairy milk twists instead of pipe cleaners.

"This is a community center," she said. "It's not just a senior center, and that makes a big difference."

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