

# Looming Large



*Above, Beth Poirier of Goldendale has been a handweaver for 25 years, selling her work to individuals and selling it at galleries, shows and festivals.*

*Beth Poirier's  
patience and skill  
on the loom create  
works of fabric art*

*By Jeanie Senior*

**B**eth Poirier of Goldendale says weaving “is not for somebody who wants instant gratification.”

Beth takes a short break from warping her eight-harness floor loom—the painstaking process involves threading 25 to 30 yards of warp—in this case, bright green cotton yarn—onto the loom.

“Typically, it takes two days to get the loom set up before I even start to weave,” she says.

Beth, a handweaver for about 25 years, moved into a storefront studio at 117 West Main Street in August 2006.

Beth and the weaving paraphernalia in her studio provide an ever-changing show for passersby, whether she is weaving or warping a loom.

She has two looms—a big floor one and a smaller one—at the front of the studio, situated where pedestrians can watch her work.

They are welcome to come into the studio and shop her wares. Lines hung with bright examples of her specialty—towels—hang in the studio. They are for sale, as are table runners and rayon scarves.

“I really enjoy having this big window here and watching the world go by,” Beth says.

She has been weaving and selling items for about 15 years. Her work is at the Golden Art Gallery in Goldendale and at Sticks and Stones Gallery in White Salmon.

She sells most of her work at juried shows, including a show at Buckman School in Portland; the Portland Handweavers Guild; the Trout Lake Arts Festival; the Maryhill Museum Arts Festival; and a show at the World Forestry Center in Portland.



*Above, colorful towels from several fabrics are among Beth's weaving specialties. Below, Beth enjoys the Main Street view while she works in her studio.*

"It's evolved," Beth says of her craft.

Growing up in Nova Scotia, she recalls being fascinated by old textiles, looms and spinning wheels when she visited museums.

"One of my grandmothers was a quilter, the other did embroidery, so I've grown up around needlework," she says.

Beth learned to knit first, then mastered spinning and weaving.

When she lived in Ketchikan, Alaska, and worked as a legal secretary, Beth took classes from a weaver.

After she moved to Sherwood, Oregon, she studied weaving at the Oregon College of Arts and Crafts and at Marylhurst College.

Initially, Beth was interested in weaving what she calls "wearables," chiefly jackets and coats.

"I've always weaved towels for fun, especially when I wanted to

experiment with new design ideas," she says.

After a while, Beth moved away from wearables and did towels, mostly made of cotton, in brilliant colors and intricate patterns.

Beth counters comments such as the towels "are too nice to use for a towel" with suggestions that they work as place settings for a hostess gift or a bridal shower.

"I market them as towels because they are wonderful towels," she explains. "They can withstand years of being used, washed and dried."

After the towels are woven and hemmed, Beth washes and pre-shrinks them.

"I have lots of repeat customers," she says.

Beth used to make towels from organic cotton, which comes in soft natural hues ranging from ivory to tan and pale sage green. Now she weaves towels in mid-century mod-

ern colors: greens, oranges, golds and reds.

"I definitely follow the trends" in popular design, Beth says.

She started weaving on a small tabletop loom. After several years, she graduated to the eight-harness floor loom.

"There are looms that are way more complicated than mine," Beth says, she notes her loom "gives you a lot more latitude with the kind of designs you can create. They're almost limitless."

Besides cotton, Beth has woven with rayon and linen. She looks forward to weaving with bamboo—a new hot fiber among hand-weavers—and "I have lots of silk I have been hoarding."

Beth says she wants to use her smaller floor loom for the silk, but "I'm still kind of figuring out all its eccentricities. The big loom I know inside out."

Beth and her husband, Bob Atwood, moved to Ponderosa Park from Sherwood about two years ago. Granddaughter Teonna Lawrence lives with them.

In the Willamette Valley, Beth worked for two wineries.

"A number of years ago we bought some property near Bickleton," she says. "It was our sanctuary away from the city. Eventually, my husband switched jobs, and it enabled us to live in Goldendale. It was the most convenient place for his work."

A truck driver for Nesbitt Enterprises, Bob transports apples and pears from Hood River and Yakima to the wholesale market in Los Angeles each week.

This spring, Beth earned a new title and a compliment from one of her drop-in customers, who stuck his head in the door to say, "Hi, weaver lady. My wife really liked that towel."

Beth says the customer came in before Valentine's Day and said I was going to make him a hero.

Beth says it's nice one of her hand-woven towels can convey hero status. ■

