

Diana and Larry Allen a handy couple

To take a tour of Diana and Larry Allen's home on Yarbrow Road is to get a glimpse of what they do for love -- what they live to do instead of what they do to live.

Both of them, well, the whole family, really, which includes Laura, Angel and Aaron, find pleasure and relaxation in making things with their hands.

The couple, who are in education -- Larry is associate superintendent of Kings Mountain Schools and Diana has been teaching for 17 years -- majored in subjects that take deft hands and an eye for design. Larry's major was industrial arts and Diana's was home economics. Diana also has a master's in Middle School teaching.

Diana's handiwork, like Larry's, is all over the house. Indeed, even the house itself is one of their products. For they both designed it, deciding on a plan after four or five attempts, and Larry built the home with help from family and hired carpenters for the heavy work.

It took them five months and the house is 21 years old. Since then, they have put down new flooring, added a pool and deck.

"You do those things as you can," said Larry.

The home is hidden in the woods at the end of a paved driveway. Larry said the quiet and peace is nice to come home to at the end of a busy day.

To the left of the house and driveway is a good-sized workshop where Larry and Diana practice the hobbies that fill their comfortable house.

Throughout the home is evidence of Diana's past-times: quilts, ceramics, needlepoint, cross-stitch. By the back door hangs her latest handiwork -- one of those flags that are so popular these days. Hers shows a flower pot of spring flowers in bright purples and greens.

Diana says she uses her crafts to teach in her fifth grade classes. Even the boys get into cross-stitch and the plastic canvas crafts. She can use the ideas in teaching geometry, she said.

She finds the time during the summers and on family trips, she said.

"I tell myself, 'My goal for this trip is I'm going to finish this thing,'" she said.

Mrs. Allen has even gotten into painting t-shirts and was wearing an outfit she designed and painted during the interview.

Larry and Diana both are into ceramics and have a kiln beside their work studio at the side of the house. Larry started while teaching industrial arts with a potter's wheel doing free form pottery. Now they both do mold casting and taught classes for a while, Diane instructing and Larry pouring. That was while she was out of work with the children. They stopped when Diana went back to work, but they still create pottery and take it to sell at shows, such as the Woolly Worm Festival in Ashe County in the fall.

"I don't know if we will ever move it to a full time business," said Larry. "The fun for us is being able to create pieces and seeing people enjoy it."

Modestly, Diana takes the sidelines beside her husband when it comes to talent.

"Larry's really the master craftsman in this house," she said.

Some of his pursuits include leatherwork, jewelry and drafting. He taught drafting in high school in the



Larry and Diana Allen stand beside the cradle Larry made for their grandson after seeing one like it in an antique shop.

late 60s, he said.

"That seemed to be a real natural for me," he said. "It's always been a very positive part of my background."

It helped him build their home and it taught his students the relationship between the school program and the real world, he said.

He taught house design in his classes and had students who went to work in design right out of school.

But his first love is designing and making furniture, as well as refinishing pieces.

"My real joy and satisfaction comes in furniture," he said.

Take the tour -- beginning in the family room. Larry motions to a hutch on one wall.

"A friend cut the walnut for this," he said.

And in a corner is a corner cabinet he restored and rebuilt, which Diana estimated to be about 100 years old. It belonged to her grandmother.

He took it to an auto shop and sandblasted it so the surface has a raised grain finish.

"That's a good convenient way to remove paint," Larry said. "Especially when you don't have access to a vat."

It was put together with wooden pegs.

Diana said he favorite piece is the grandfather clock in the foyer. Larry designed it and made it from "scratch," he said.

"It's an original -- not another one like it," he said, saying he threw away the plans after he finished it.

They got the works at Spruce Pine. They're German-made with seven-day movement and four different chime sets. The wood is mahogany that he got in Charlotte.

Larry usually gets his wood from trees he cuts down. Then he takes the cut trees to a saw mill and has them kill dried.

Another eye-catching piece is the front door, which also came from Diana's grandmother's home.

"You can tell it's old by the wooden pegs it's put together with," she said.

Larry made the stained glass that's inset in the top

Story and Photos by Renee Walser

half of the door, and Diana did the needlework across the top.

On to one of the children's rooms.

In it rests a bed that Larry used a lathe to rope the posters.

"This is not just wood-working," he said.

You have to be a mathematician, too, to plan the degrees of cutting in the posters.

Besides using a lathe, he likes to use his chisels, which he made in college to do the intricate roping and reeding on the beds.

In the corner on a desk is a stained glass lamp Larry made.

And across from that is a huge cedar chest he made for one of the daughters.

In one of the bedrooms sits a wooden rocking chair and a jelly cabinet.

And in Aaron's room, a queen size bed with reeding on the posters sits in the center of the room. Larry built the cabinetry and study area across one end of the room.

For the master bedroom, a shaving stand is in one corner. It's a Christmas gift, the first thing Larry ever made for Diana.

Below the bed is a blanket chest and the bed itself is a design Larry constructed in college. Opposite the bed is a secretary with curved cabinets inside.

"You can tell quality because of the dovetail joints cut by hand," said Larry.

He also built the triple dresser to complete the suit.

They keep a cradle that has been used by Diana's mother down through her own grandson.

"Larry salvaged it," said Diana.

Downstairs in the basement/recreation area, a large cradle rests waiting for more grandchildren. Larry saw one like it at an antique show and patterned his own. The cradle rocks gently when you pull out the stoppers.

When his grandson got older, he made a crib out of cherry.

Does he ever make mistakes?

Of course, he said.

"I just cut it off and do another one," he said, smiling.

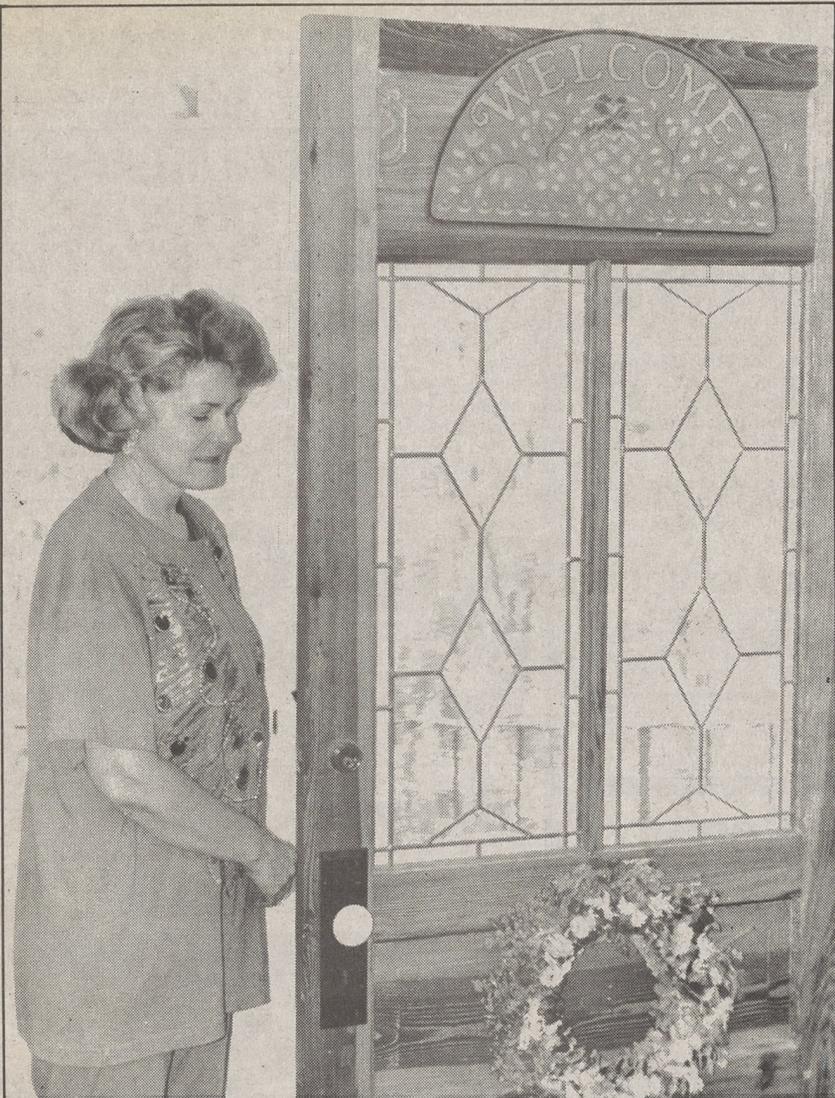
Larry lately has gotten into making specialty items for sale. In the middle of the basement is an example of one item -- a dinette of wood with bears painted on the back of the chairs.

"It's very popular with grandparents," he said. He is making one set for a lady with no children. She just likes to collect bears.

When does Larry find time for all his hobbies?

"Between 9 and 10 p.m. and 1 and 2 a.m.," he jokes.

"Really, when other people are on the golf course, that's when I'm in my workshop."



Diana opens the front door that belonged to her grandmother's house. Larry made the stained glass and Diana did the needlepoint "Welcome."



Diana Allen's favorite piece -- a grandfather clock Larry designed and made from "scratch."