

WHAT A DOLL!

By Emma Taylor

Most little girls love playing with dolls, and for some that love never goes away.

Fabric artist Sue Hale-Ladouceur, of Mallorytown, has always loved dolls and said she can remember her dad saying to her "If you ask for another doll for Christmas I will fall over."

"Of course I did want a doll for Christmas, I still want dolls for Christmas," she said.

Under the name Maggie's Fabric Art and Soft Sculpture Hale-Ladouceur creates one-of-a-kind dolls which include Santa Claus and Elves at Christmas time. She also makes Christmas tree ornaments-simple figures that include angels, cats, and fairies.

She started out making things for her own kids and people would tell her she

should be selling them. After receiving many compliments on the creations, she decided to take their advice and started selling them out of her home. It has now been over 25 years. She has also donated many of her dolls for auction or money-makers for people over the years.

Primarily self-taught, she has taken doll making courses through the years but learned most of her tricks from her mother. When she was a child they would make dolls together using pre-printed cut outs. Her mother would draw on them and they would design dresses together.

Hale-Ladouceur designed the original doll patterns by hand after going through several versions to see what worked best. Each is stuffed with fibrefill stuffing because they have to be very firm in order to keep the shape. The bodies of the

dolls are all machine sewn because the stuffing tends to poke through between the stitches if hand sewn. She machines sews the backs of the dresses as well, but gathers it by hand. The petticoats and hats are all sewn by hand.

Most of her dolls are female with the exception of Santa Claus and the Elves at Christmas time.

"I thought I should make some male dolls but they don't wear pretty dresses," she said with a laugh.

Although she hasn't always felt so, she now considers her dolls art forms in themselves. "When I work on the faces, I use the cloth like a canvas so that really is an art. I have to be in the mood to do the face. I have to prime the fabric and do a couple of flesh coats on it, everything has to dry, be sanded, and then I start to do the faces with acrylic paint. Lots of times I do it with a toothpick," she said.

Each piece is unique and each doll unfolds as she goes along. It takes roughly a week to finish each doll from start to finish, putting in about 5 to 6 hours a day on it.



She tries to fit this in around her part-time job as a baker.

When looking for fabric, she keeps her eye out for high-quality cotton, usually visiting quilting stores to find what she needs.

"I'm always on the lookout for little embellishments and thinking of ways to use them. Sometimes I will take a piece of broken jewellery and use the stones out of it. I'll see a certain fabric I really like and I think wow, that will really look good as a doll and then I begin a new one," she said.

She prefers to work with dolls that are about 14 inches tall. "Once you start getting into anything bigger you end up going through too much stuffing." The biggest doll she has ever made was 30 inches tall.

Hale-Ladouceur, who belongs to the Thousand Islands Arts (TIA) organization, takes part in a yearly TIA show-this past year it was held November 16 and 17th 2013 in Rockport. She also did another show at Eagle Point Winery November 2nd and 3rd 2013. She said she found it a challenge to have everything ready for two shows.

"I really get in the zone when I'm doing them and especially the time of year from September on, I'm trying to get ready for shows. I run out of time because the more I make the more ideas I get," she said.

In addition to the dolls that she sells, she enjoys doing special projects. Her granddaughter, who is five years old, receives a handmade doll every Christmas and she has also been busily making Monster pillows for her three grandchildren. Spending more time working on quilting and patchwork is something she would like to do.

"I don't seem to have the time and I have all this fantastic fabric. I did do some appliqué quilts but there are so many things I don't know about quilting and patchwork. I would like to learn and maybe take some courses," she said.

Hale-Ladouceur's mother passed away before she had a chance to see her daughter's work but "I think she would have loved it-she really loved dolls too." Hale-Ladouceur said. **LH**

If you are interested in making one of Sue's wonderful creations your own, you can reach her at 613-923-2557.

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