

STITCHING UP MEMORIES

PROFILE: Youngstown woman turns passion into area business.

BY MICHAEL PITKIN
mpedit@gnnews.com



What started as a hobby is slowly growing into a lucrative business for a Youngstown woman. Pam O'Brien runs and operates "Memories, One Stitch at a Time."

It wasn't all that long ago that O'Brien began delving into the creation of what she calls "photo-tapestries."

To create a photo tapestry, O'Brien re-interprets a photograph, and stitches it into a one-of-a-kind, personalized work of art.

O'Brien scans an image, and uses photo editing software to

convert it to cross stitches. O'Brien then picks out the colors, and matches them to her collection of over 700 threads. Finally, O'Brien sends her pieces to be professionally matted and framed. Each piece generally takes four to six weeks to reach completion, and can have up to a million stitches. The process is rather time consuming, but yields quite an impressive result.

"It's almost like an optical illu-

THE LEWISTON HARVEST FESTIVAL, AND CRAFT SHOW

- **WHAT:** Over 70 artists, live entertainment, food vendors and a petting zoo
- **WHEN:** 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday
- **WHERE:** Along Center Street in Lewiston
- **ADMISSION:** Free

sion. People say "Oh, what a great photograph!" only to realize shortly after that it's actually stitched," O'Brien said. "The first attempt was very crude, yet I got hooked right away. It was something that I understood, and realized that I had an itch for it.

SEE STITCH ON PAGE 4A



JAMES NEISS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

CREATIVE: Pam O'Brien, owner of "Memories, One Stitch at a Time," holds a photo-tapestry of her mother taken in the 1920s. Using computer imaging software and porting it to an embroidery machine, she was able to create a 25-color reproduction in 275,000 stitches. O'Brien will be showing her work at this weekend's Harvest Festival in Lewiston.



JAMES NEISS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

ART: Artist Pam O'Brien, owner of "Memories, One Stitch at a Time," shows off a photo-tapestry of a stained glass sailboat that's made of 87 thread colors and 550,000 stitches. O'Brien will be showing her work at this weekend's Harvest Festival in Lewiston.

STITCH ...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1A

"Very few people have the patience, but I am so dedicated." So far, business is going very well.

"I'm just getting my feet wet in the business aspect. I have been doing it for five years for friends and family and they encouraged me to pursue it as a business," she said, adding, "In earnest, for what I'm doing right now — it has been practice to perfection. In spring of this year, everything was in place and I felt like I could finally start selling my pieces. I have my craft perfected. I feel like I could take any photograph, and interpret it accurately."

Samples of O'Brien's "Home Decorator" series are available for purchase at the Canterbury Place in Lewiston and can run anywhere between \$30 and \$275. She will also have work featured in this year's Lewiston Harvest Festival, and Craft Show.

"For the show, I've developed an exclusive, limited edition Christmas ornament series. The ornaments will each have between 50,000 and 100,000 stitches, and will feature various yuletide images. They will be signed, and can be personalized as gifts," she said.

"I'm very happy that I'm having a gradual build up of business," she said. "For now, I like

that it's a personal operation."

O'Brien does, however, intend on expanding in time.

"I plan on increasing the equipment that I have, and I'm currently developing a Web site as well. I hope to expand beyond Lewiston; into the Buffalo area, as well as Connecticut and Sarasota Springs where I have family," she said.

Regardless of where the future takes O'Brien, she is perfectly content with creating "Memories, One Stitch at a Time" — for now.