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Volunteer Nancy Crockett teaches knitting and crocheting every week at the Lighthouse Point Library

By Phyllis J. Neuberger
Pelican staff

Meet Nancy Crockett, a smiling pleasant lady, who spends her life in a wheelchair, but does not indulge in a pity party. “I have such tremendous upper body muscles, I could arm wrestle a football player,” she quips, adding, “These muscles come from pushing myself around.”

“I’ve been knitting since I was six years old. At that early age my hands were turning in. Cerebral Palsy (CP) had begun to rear its ugly head. My great aunt Bert figured out that if I learned to knit, my hands would eventually turn back out and it worked. I’ve been knitting and crocheting ever since.” At this point, Nancy removed a big bag hanging on the handle of her chair to show some of her work. She held up a simple scarf being made by beginning students and then displayed some of her own beautifully crafted sweaters, berets, slippers and crochet edged towels. “I can’t produce enough of the slippers,” she says. “Every time I think I’m ready to put them on ETSY, the website for hand made items, some one seems to want to buy them. They are triple strand knit with rug backing on the soles to keep feet from sliding.”

Asked how she prices her products, Nancy says she checks retail stores that carry upscale hand knits. “I charge much less than they do and so far I’ve had no complaints.”

Christy Keyes, Library Director, considers Nancy a yarn artist. She says, “Nancy does such exquisite work. She is very gentle in her instruction and she really enjoys watching her students grow and succeed. Recently one of her students completed knitting her first scarf and she paraded around the library showing it off. We all got a kick out of her.”



Nancy has been teaching for two hours every Wednesday from 12 to 2 p.m. for the past two years. “I have between two to eight ladies every week,” she says. “Some are regulars and others come back to learn a certain new technique. Just last week a lady came in to find out how to attach two sides using knitting needles. Another woman wanted to learn how to cast on which is a first step. Some return over and over until they are ready to do more sophisticated creations on their own.”

Librarian Rosemary Wilson says, “Nancy is a wonderful addition to our volunteer team. She gives all the time in the world to her students and they love her for it. Some have even come in with half finished projects they started long ago, and she helps them complete them. We’re so glad we have her.”

Nancy enjoys being a volunteer teacher although she has taught professionally and may do it again some day. “What’s important to me,” she says, “is seeing the students enjoy learning. I get great satisfaction. There’s camaraderie here and friendships are formed. Everyone is welcome. I have never had a male student, but men do knit and they are welcome. Keeping hands busy is a great stress reliever. The repetitive motion is very soothing and kind of makes your mind go blank and your troubles slip away.”

One of her students, Bess Antonelli, says, “I was so lucky to find Nancy who is very patient with those of us who have a hard time mastering knitting. I want to make a blanket for each of my two new great grandchildren who are expected in May. I hope my crocheted blankets will be ready before they are.”

Although she is now retired, Nancy had a 20-year successful banking career and says, “I was a teller until my CP made it impossible for me to stand or walk. When I became a wheelchair person at 42, the bank made me a customer service rep. When working became too difficult, I stopped and worked part time as a tax preparer to supplement my income.”

She sighs and says, “Recently I lost my mother who was my best friend. I am really challenging my limited physical ability to close up either her house or mine. This is also a very emotional time because my mother was my biggest cheerleader. She made me think I could be independent and I am. She was a much loved, Eucharistic Minister at St. Gabriel, and a dedicated volunteer. She taught me to give back wherever I could.” “I moved to Florida from Massachusetts after earning a B.S. degree from Worcester State College as a qualified French and English teacher. I could never get a job teaching because of my CP.”

Though life has dealt this woman some tough cards to play, she continues to keep teaching and learning. Thank you Nancy Crockett for sharing your skills with the community.