

# Kara Johndro has a “feel” for ancient art of spinning

By EOWYN LeMAY IVEY

Frontiersman reporter

MAT-SU — When Kara Johndro was a little girl, a woman with a spinning wheel visited her elementary class. Years later, Johndro cannot recall much about the day or the woman. What stayed with her was the feel of the yarn between her fingertips.

It is the texture, the softness of the fibers, that drew her to the spinning wheel and has kept her there.

“It’s a very touchy-feely thing,” the Mat-Su woman said.

In the upstairs bedroom of her home on Knik River Road where she lives with her husband and two daughters, Johndro sat at her wooden spinning wheel and worked the pedals with her bare feet. A pile of light gray wool cascaded out of a knee-high basket beside her. With the quiet whir of the wheel, the fluffy wool was transformed into tight yarn.

“It’s soft,” Johndro explained. “It’s not itchy wool.”

Nearby, a loom held a partly woven project. Throughout the room, plastic tubs and baskets filled with yarn, wool and supplies were neatly

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Kara Johndro spins wool from one of her sheep into soft yarn. Johndro says she enjoys the textures of the craft.

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# JOHNDRO: Woman's world is spinning

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tucked away.

"I've got spinning and weaving stuff everywhere," Johndro confessed.

And when she says everywhere, she means everywhere.

Hand spindles with lengths of yarn sat atop the staircase banister. Another spinning wheel was in front of the television in the family room. A playroom in the garage held another loom, her drum carder and more baskets of wool, Angora rabbit hair and balls of yarn.

And she does not confine her craft to these rooms. She said she also works in the kitchen and other areas of the house. And on long, warm summer days, she likes to bring her spinning wheel out onto the deck. With Pioneer Peak looming behind her and Knik River flowing in the Valley below, Johndro falls into the rhythm and textures of spinning.

"It's very meditative," she said.

Johndro bought her first spinning wheel 14 years ago and the craft has since become a lifestyle. About two hours each day Johndro cards, spins, knits and weaves. She spins while children



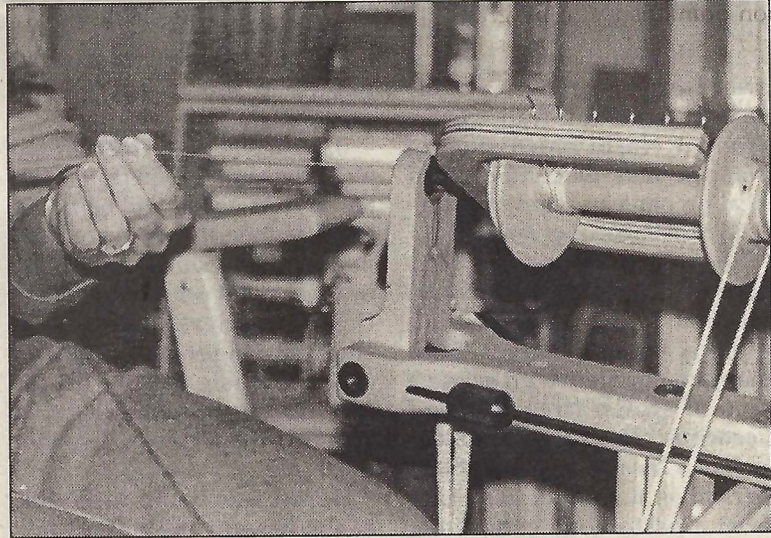
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**Kara Johndro feeds wool into her spinning wheel. Slippers, socks and hats are just a few of the items she makes from hand-spun yarn.**

play in her home day care. She spins while her daughters watch television. She spins while she listens to mystery novels on tape. And when her husband was in the hospital, she took her hand spindles and continued to spin.

It is no surprise, then, that Johndro needs a steady supply of fiber. This is where the two sheep and the half-dozen Angora rabbits that live in her backyard come in. The sheep are sheared regularly, and every few months Johndro combs piles of silky Angora hair from the rabbits. Johndro then washes the fibers and in some cases runs them through the drum carder, which combs it into smooth sheets.

Other fibers have also found their way into her projects — the downy fur of Malamute huskies, blonde strands of silk that inspire images of Rapunzel and even ragged old socks that she wove into kitchen rugs. While Johndro enjoys experimenting



with different fibers, she says Angora rabbit hair is by far her favorite.

"It's so rich," she said.

Johndro said some people spin, weave and knit because they enjoy the colors and patterns. She, too, appreciates this aspect of the craft. But she said it is the textures that attract her to fiber arts.

Besides the initial introduction when she was a little girl and a relative's interest in spinning, Johndro did not come from a background in the craft. She said most of her family members think her somewhat odd.

"They want to know why I wouldn't just go to the store and get it," she said. But when she sends them hand-spun, hand-knitted presents for Christmas and birthdays, they don't complain.

While some in the Lower 48 may find her interests unorthodox, Johndro has found a community in the Valley that shares her love of wool, yarn and spin-

ning wheels. She is an active member of the Valley Fiber Arts Guild, which meets Thursday mornings at Vagabond Blues in Palmer. The guild also organizes retreats, shows and demonstrations in classrooms and at the Alaska State Fair.

Johndro sells her hand-spun, hand-knit booties, hats, wimples, scarves and other items through her business, Echo Valley Studio. Her products can be found in several local shops, including Chain Reaction Gallery in Wasilla. Johndro joked, however, that the business does not make huge profits but instead supports her "habit."

Johndro is currently working on several projects, including a wool rug and a vest sewn from sections of fabric she wove. She continues to learn more about these various aspects of fiber arts. But when given the choice, she will go to the spinning wheel.

"Spinning is my first love," Johndro said.