

## **Fiber Sculptor brings new medium to art scene**

By Hope Strong

From an early age, Judith Austin was aware of her artistic talent and, like so many artists, she has been in a constant quest to create. Beginning today at Main Street Art, Austin's Fabric sculptures will go on display.

"I started a long time ago," Austin explains about her artistic inclinations. "I was four years old and drew a very unusual crayon picture of a happy man admiring pansies. It won second place at a contest for children's art at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington D.C."

Austin made her way through school, ending up with a bachelor of fine arts from Virginia commonwealth University, but not before she underwent the struggles that often create new art such as her fiber sculpture.

"VCU has a superb sculpture program," Austin said, "but I couldn't weld or hammer. Everything would fall apart, so I decided to weave a sculpture. It was born of necessity if I wanted to pass the course."

After college, Austin had the opportunity to live and work in Chicago, where she took advantage of the big city's proclamation in the 80's that 2% of every architectural projects budget had to be spent on art. Austin created commissioned pieces for the Dupont Corporation out of carpet fiber and then she sculpted 4,000 strands of crocheted wool for the public relations firm of Burson Marsteller. While in the windy city, Austin also had pieces in the Ruth Volid Gallery.

"When people ask what fiber sculpture is, I say, you've probably already got one in the closet, the old sweater that Aunt Edna made you. Basically, it's very familiar stuff." Undergoing a life change, Austin found herself unhappy in upstate New York. She reassessed her priorities and made a concerted effort to get back to the things that made her happy, art and children.

Working up at Tar ghee with the children's program, Austin takes advantage of the resorts off-season to explore her art, and she is finding that Teton Valley is accommodating to her creativity.

"This area is amazing, and the affinity that the West has for fiber is amazing," Austin said. "With talent and diversity of multi-faceted people here, I'm finding kindred spirits." Two of those kindred spirits, Alan McKnight and Kate West, will be playing guitar, fiddle and possibly recorder at the art opening tonight.

Miso Hungry with a remodeled kitchen and an extended winter menu will be offering Celtic food and mulled wine for the festive occasion.

“I feel so fortunate to be here in the valley. It’s an inspiring place for artists with a real sense of community,” Austin said.

The very eclectic collection of large and small fiber sculptures will be on display throughout the holiday season, but the opening begins at 6:30 p.m. today.