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Fog
at 1:20 AM



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Saturday, February 26, 2005

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Ap Associated Press
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Got Butter Art?

Exhibit and Lecture Celebrate Women's History Month

By Maggie Wolff Peterson
Special to The Winchester Star

In a land of plenty, creative folks will find ways to use the abundance around them in unconventional ways.

In the midwestern United States, that translates into butter sculpture.

There is a long tradition, at county and state fairs and other exhibitions, of turning the creamy products of midwestern dairy cows into likenesses of pageant queens, historical figures and even the cows themselves. One woman,



Norma "Duffy" Lyons sculptured cows from butter for

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In Your Opinion

Do you think Republican should oust Winchester Sen. H. Russell Potts Jr. as chairman of the Committee on Education and Health, after running as an independent in the governor's race in

Norma
"Duffy"

Iowa State Fair.

Lyons, sculpted a butter cow annually at the Iowa State Fair from 1966 until last year, according to Pamela H. Simpson, an art history professor at Washington and Lee University, who will be in Winchester Wednesday for a lecture on the history of the craft.

Simpson's lecture, "I Can't Believe It's Not Art: The History of Butter Sculpture," will be held at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday at the Shenandoah Arts Council, 811 S. Loudoun St., and is timed to coincide with Women's History Month. Simpson said the convention of creating art from food is a particularly distaff practice.

There are examples from as long ago as the Renaissance of butter being used to make banquet decorations, Simpson said. But in the United States, the practice dates to the 1876 Centennial celebration in Philadelphia, at which a dairyman's wife, Carolyn Brooks of Arkansas, created a bas-relief portrait of a popular 19th century literary figure, "The Dreaming Iolanthe."

Brooks had begun her art by embellishing butter pats at home. By the time of the centennial, she had been sculpting large pieces in butter for about five years and "had an established reputation," Simpson said.

The sculpture was considered a curiosity. "People thought it was unusual, but they were really impressed with what she did," Simpson said.

"That's when the butter sculpture phenomenon started," said Marietta Ayuso, a continuing education student at Shenandoah University who has collected items for a display about butter art at the university's History and Tourism Center, 20 S. Cameron St., which will be installed following Brooks' lecture.

By 1893, the dairy industry had become interested in butter art, and today, groups such as the Midwest Dairy Association are sponsors of butter-art installations at regional events. As long ago as the 1800s, butter makers were fighting the margarine industry for market share, Simpson said.

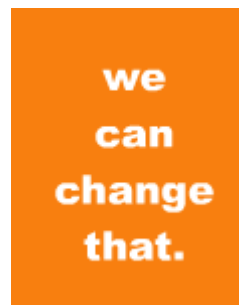
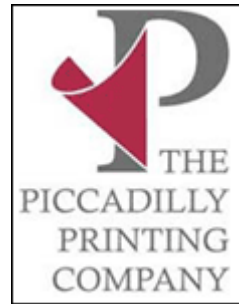
Butter sculptures at agricultural fairs remind the public of the wholesomeness and wealth of natural foods in our country. "It's an effort by the butter industry to

November?

- Yes
- No

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bring attention to itself,” Simpson said. “When you have butter put out in abundance, it reminds people of abundance.”

In fact, butter scarcity and food rationing in the years surrounding World War II led to protests after a Canadian fair included a 1952 butter sculpture of soon-to-be crowned Princess Elizabeth of Great Britain. “In 1952, butter was still being rationed,” Simpson said.

Great leaps forward in butter art were manageable after refrigeration entered the picture at the turn of the 20th century. The Pan-American Exhibition, in Buffalo, N.Y., featured a huge refrigerated case, in which a nearly 700-square-foot sculpture of the Minnesota State House was effected in butter.

“It’s a beautiful, classical building with a dome,” Simpson said. “It was done in amazing detail.”

Lyons’ butter art made the national news during the 2000 presidential election campaign, when reporters covering the Iowa Caucuses discovered The Last Supper carved in butter at the Iowa State Fair. All of a sudden, Lyons was being invited onto television, and appeared on the Late Night with David Letterman and NBC Today shows.

In Minnesota, it has long been the practice to render the annual Princess Kay of the Milky Way in butter. “One of your honors is you get your portrait sculpted in butter,” Simpson said.

The sitting is an event. Inside a rotating refrigerated case, it takes an artist six to eight hours to reduce a 90-pound block of Grade A butter to a sculpture of the princess, according to the Midwest Dairy Association.

“As (the artist) carves the butter away, an assistant takes it and spreads it on saltines for the crowd,” Simpson said.

At the end of the fair, the princess gets to take her sculpture home. Through the years, many princess sculptures have been consumed at community corn roasts and pancake days, but some princesses keep them.

Including 1966 winner Linda Kottke, who brought her sculpture back to the farm. “My butter head was in the



barn for the winter,” she said. “A neighbor came over, saw the butter head and called the police.”


“I Can’t Believe It’s Not Art: The History of Butter Sculpture” will be presented at the Shenandoah Arts Council, 811 S. Loudoun St., on Wednesday at 7:30 p.m., and will be both preceded and followed by a reception. On Thursday, an exhibition on butter art will open in the exhibition gallery (Room 213) at Shenandoah University’s History and Tourism Center, 20 S. Cameron St., Winchester. All events are free and open to the public. Call 535-3542.

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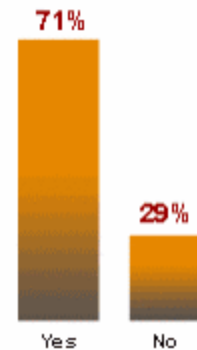
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Yes No



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