

The Post and Courier

Keep them in stitches

Today's knitters are a social bunch, not just grannies

By [Kristen Hankla](#)
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At first glance, June 26 at The Joe was just your regular baseball game.



Photo by Wade Spees

Staff

Jean Vickers, a physician, knits a baby blanket during a gathering of a stitching group that meets at Knit on Wentworth Street every Wednesday.

But something strange was happening in Section 202.

Amid the beer and hot dogs, the peanuts and Cracker Jacks, fans were knitting.

They'd brought their yarn, needles, patterns -- the works -- for Stitch n' Pitch, an event held by major and minor league baseball teams around the country in conjunction with World Wide Knit in Public Day.

For many, the word "knitting" conjures up a quiet elderly woman clacking away in

her rocking chair. But the craft is being taken up by a range of people, many of whom aren't so quiet.

The newest wave of knitters is a social bunch. In addition to going to baseball games (and cheering loudly), local knitters gather at coffee houses, restaurants and knitting shops. They go on vacations together (being sure to hit every yarn store along the way) and get matching tattoos together (with a knitting theme of course). The groups go by monikers such as "Stitch 'n B----" and "Chicks with Sticks."

"It's the best gossip in town," says Marianne Slote, who knits with a group that meets Wednesday nights at Knit, 87 Wentworth St.

More than 20 women gathered for last week's meeting. They filled all the love seats, upholstered chairs and ottomans in a cozy, living-room-like space at the front of the downtown yarn store. Some put their needles down to hold one knitter's baby as he was passed around.

Pam Eliason, a 44-year-old nurse practitioner, said she chooses to knit with the group instead of at home because "there's only two cats and a dog at my house and they don't really have great conversational skills."



Photo by Grace Beahm

Staff

Julie Gunderson, Judi Kirby and Eileen Berchem knit together in the stands of The Joe during the RiverDogs' Stitch n' Pitch on June 26. Local knitters are popping up in multiple public places, including coffee houses, restaurants, yarn shops and libraries.

The women ranged from a 24-year-old TV producer making her first pair of mittens to a 70-year-old author of knitting books.

"We're all from such different places and different jobs that this really kind of brings us together. We never would have met socially otherwise," Eliason said. "We've been able to develop some very, very strong, hopefully lasting friendships."

She and two women she met in the group recently had their forearms inked with an ambigram that reads "knit" when viewed from one direction and "purl" from another.

Knitting has fallen in and out of fashion for the past two centuries, according to a best-selling book "[Stitch 'n B----: The Knitter's Handbook](#)," by Debbie Stoller.

Stoller is credited with launching the recent knitting movement; she formed a group named the same as her book in New York City in 1999. Today, nearly 800 clubs throughout the world are registered [online](#).

Emily Spearman, owner of The Village Knittery in Summerville, has observed a recent resurgence in knitting. She said it has come in two waves: one around 2000 and one around 2008.

Spearman said a second strata of knitters has developed, made up of younger women as well as men.

"They're knitting much more fearlessly. They're not intimidated. They just do, and they're creating some really great things."



Photo by Wade Spees

Staff

Members of one local stitching group meet every Wednesday night at Knit on Wentworth Street. The number of knitters varies; shop owner Gay Murrill said last week's turnout of about 20 was on the high side. Additional knitters worked at a table in another part of the store.

She thinks the economy may have something to do with knitting's current popularity. People are able to create items that they could not necessarily afford to buy, she said.

"We have a lot of young mothers that are into making things for their children because it's very green, it's very organic," Spearman said. "Those same items, if you were to go to a boutique shop, would cost a fortune."

Gay Murrill, co-owner of Knit, said the number of knitters skyrocketed when there was a scarf craze in the fashion world.

"The resurgence started about six years ago, when everybody decided they had to have scarves. There was a madness with what's known as novelty yarn -- this fluffy stuff right here," she said, pointing to skeins with feathery fibers sticking out.

Meredith Knox, 29, recently taught herself to knit by watching YouTube videos and borrowing a DVD from the library.

The TV editor said her interest in the craft had been piqued when she was browsing in Barnes & Noble and came across a knitting book. She started coming to meetings about a month ago to meet other women who knit.

Many of those in Wednesday's group said they learned to knit early in life from their mothers or grandmothers but weren't particularly interested in it until much later.

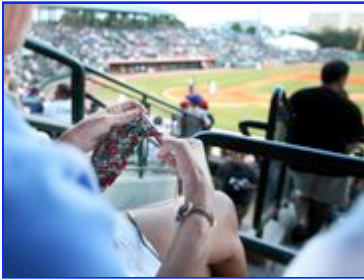


Photo by Grace Beahm

Staff

Eileen Berchem of Beaufort knits as she watches the RiverDogs play the Greenville Drive on June 26.

Now they say they pick up needles because it's meditative or it gives them something to do in waiting rooms. It's a portable, pleasurable creative outlet. One said she likes being able to make clothes that fit her long torso.

Maria Simons, a 49-year-old editor, said, "It's cheaper than therapy."

Knitters from Knit's group and The Village Knittery's Third Thursdays group and their families attended the RiverDogs recent celebration of World Wide Knit in Public Day.

A woman named Danielle Landes started the day "as a way for knitters to come together and enjoy each other's company," according to its website, www.wkipday.com. The number of gatherings has grown from 25 in 2005 to 750 in 2009.

Eileen Berchem drove from Beaufort for Stitch n' Pitch because she likes baseball and the idea of promoting her craft.

"It's not just old ladies sitting at home knitting," Berchem said. "It's all kinds of people, and we're out to have fun."

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