



# Decatur High graduate enjoys 25 years of building craft business

Carolyn (DeMay) Richards, a 1967 graduate of Decatur Community High School, owns the Craft Peddler in Brewster, which is marking 25 years of service in the tiny community. She is the daughter of the late Hal and Martha DeMay and was reared on a farm near Cedar Bluffs.

Her husband, Steve Richards, also a 1967 Oberlin graduate, is general manager of S&T Telephone Association at Brewster. His parents are Eunice Richards of Oberlin and the late George Richards.

A recent story in the *Colby Free Press* by Vera Sloan tells about the craft store and it follows:

Tucked away in quiet downtown Brewster, a couple of miles off I-70 and well off even the old highway, the Craft Peddler might be among northwest Kansas' best-kept secrets.

But crafters know it's not only one of the few such stores in the area, but one of only a few of its size anywhere that carries such a wide array of products.

March is National Craft Month, and 2009 marks the Craft Peddler's 25th year in business.

Owner Carolyn Richards said she has customers from every state including Alaska and Hawaii, and has some outside the United States. She recently had a customer from Australia order less than \$5 worth of supplies, so the bill was actually less than the postage.

Mrs. Richards said she was a church secretary and preschool teacher and had no knowledge of

crafts before she opened the store. She said she always thought crafts looked like fun, but after she took a wheat-weaving class, she was hooked.

She moved to Brewster from Syracuse in 1984 when her husband Steve took a job as plant supervisor with S&T Telephone.

Her children were young and she was busy being a mom, she said. Then Steve called one day and said the bank had a building for sale, and she thought it might be a great spot to start a little craft store.

"I had never even run a cash register," Mrs. Richards recalled, "and I had no idea where to begin, but I found a couple of wholesalers in Denver and called them to ask what I should have to begin a store."

The store grew from bare necessities in 1984, things like glue, felt and ribbon, to the 27,000 items in her inventory today. She built the present store on Main Street in 1991.

"People come into Brewster from the Interstate because of my big billboards," she said, "and they tell me I have things they can't find in the city."

Many of them become repeat customers as they travel the Interstate from year to year on their way to visit relatives, she said.

She has done hundreds of classes and continues to schedule classes which include everything from cake decorating to Christmas ornaments to jewelry making, scrapbooking and painting.

Word of mouth and a newsletter list with 2,400 names were Mrs.

Richards' main routes to growing her business. Later, she got an eBay store and she now sells items all over the world.

She has over 500 customers for her Wilton line of cake-baking supplies just through her eBay store. She said one person ordered from a little island they had never heard of and they had to look it up and she noted that she is always mailing packages to some far off place. Her store can be found at [www.nwkansasonline.com](http://www.nwkansasonline.com) and at [www.thecraftpeddler.net](http://www.thecraftpeddler.net).

"I don't know if I could open a craft store from scratch today," she said, "because crafts come and go. When scrapbooking got popular, I was scared to put in a four-foot section of supplies, but today, it takes up a major portion of floor space because the products are so versatile in so many other crafts." She said she has had many favorites, but right now scrapbooking is it.

"I just never have a day when I don't want to come to work," she said, "I just love it, and never dreamed we would ever have this many items. Right now glass etching is popular, and we sell a ton of it on the Internet."

Mrs. Richards said her youngest was a first grader when they moved to Brewster, and now her children are all grown and she has five grandchildren. The clan includes sons Shawn and Marti Richards, Colorado Springs, and Scott and Jill Richards, Windsor, Colo., and daughter Trisha Richards and Justin Giger, Parker, Colo.



STORE OWNER CAROLYN RICHARDS unpacks supplies at her Craft Peddler store in Brewster. The former Carolyn DeMay, she is a 1967 graduate of Decatur Community High School. — Photo by Vera Sloan

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