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Pam Duncan is a "happy hooker."

And she's quite proud of it. "People always look at me funny when I tell them I'm a hooker. It's only when I tell them that I rug hook for a hobby that they understand what I mean," Duncan laughed.

Turning serious, she explained people who rug hook call themselves "happy hookers" because they have fun doing their hobby. Some take their hobby further by operating rug hooking studios or stores that selling needed material and equipment.

"I'm strictly a hooker, a happy hooker."

The Charles Street resident and retired physiotherapist remembers taking a beginner's course at Loyalist College in 1980. Her teacher was Picton's Dorothy Haight, who's now 90 and still teaching traditional rug hooking to others.

"She got me hooked on it."

Duncan still has her beginner's rug laying in her living room.

But, over the years, she has created numerous other rugs, wall hangings, ornaments and framed rug hooking designs using such fabric as wool, nylon, yarn and even embroidery silk and metallic cord.

"Rugs and wall hangings make wonderful heirlooms because you have actually hooked them and given them to your family and friends. I suppose they will always remember you for having done them," said the 59-year-old Duncan.

She is secretary-treasurer of the Ontario Hooking Craft Guild, Quinte Isle Branch (Picton). She's also the guild's representative for Lennox and Addington, Frontenac, Hastings and Prince Edward, Northumberland and Durham.

The 25 members meet weekly at Haight's studio to hook, discuss new techniques from courses attended and share a few laughs.

They're all involved in traditional rug hooking, which means no knots, but only pulling loops of material through the backing.

A hooker's tools are a hoop or frame, various sizes of hooks, scissors and maybe even a cutter.

Duncan has picked up the art of hooking quite easily.

"I've always done some form of hand work, like sewing, knitting, crocheting, tatting and some quilting. I used to make my own clothes. And as a child, I used to make all my own doll clothes."

She credits her mother and grandmother for pursuing her creative talents.

Born and raised in England, Duncan completed high school and enrolled in a three-year physiotherapy program. She graduated in 1965 with her accreditation and went to work for a Liverpool hospital.

Two years later, she decided to emigrate to Canada in 1967.

"I was 24 when I came to Canada to work at Sunnybrook Hospital in Toronto," she said proudly.

She spent two years at Sunnybrook and then joined a private practice for another two years.

Duncan worked another eight years at the Baycrest Centre for Geriatric Care and moved to Belleville in 1979 to join the physiotherapy department at Belleville General Hospital.

In 1984, she opened and ran the hospital's physiotherapy clinic in Madoc.

A serious car accident in July of 1998 and subsequent ankle surgery several months later triggered her retirement in 1999 and to spend more time with Peter, her partner of the past six years.

"I loved being a physiotherapist, helping others and being in contact with people from all ethnic groups and all walks of life."

Duncan is content hooking now.

"It's a wonderful hobby and you have these lovely pieces to show when you're finished...I find it very relaxing and you get a sense of satisfaction in creating something wonderful."

She normally hooks for a couple of hours every evening and compared it to "painting with wool. If you are creative, you can make your own patterns. If you feel you're not creative, patterns are available from suppliers."

It's enjoyable and painstaking work.

She said it takes about six to nine hours to hook one square foot of rug. By hooking every day, it would take about a year to complete an eight-by-10-foot area rug.