

The Neil Gowan family

a well talented group

By Ann Kelly

Family Living Editor

If variety is the spice of life, then the Neil Gowan family is well seasoned.

In addition to operating a 200-acre beef farm, family interests are many and varied. Mrs. Gowan decorates cakes for all occasions, with wedding cakes her specialty. Dave, 23, works in leather, making everything from key cases to shoes, and Dianne, 21, is a clothing designer who even does her own fabric designs.

If that isn't enough involvement for one family furniture refinishing or music occupies much of their spare time.

Dave Gowan plays drums with Jim Patterson and the Northern Gentlemen. Dianne Gowan's fiancée also plays in the group and Dianne, though not in the group, plays the piano, flute and accordion.

It isn't uncommon for "jam sessions" at the Gowan household to draw about 100 people, including players and listeners. Some bring food, and many stay for supper. The music drifting across the creek and fields of the RR 1 Allenford home ranges from blue grass to jazz, from country and western to modern.

Another Gowan son, Bob, who is working on his masters degree in geomorphology is a guaranteed visitor at jam session time.

Each talented Gowan became involved in his or her respective hobby somewhat by accident.

Outside the family, Mrs. Gowan's first cake was for the friend of an aunt. Her first wedding cake was for her sister, 19 years ago. She knows that she has done more than 200 wedding cakes since but hasn't kept an accurate record.

Give Mrs. Gowan a decorating tip, some sugar and water, or icing and her talents know no limits. She makes everything from roses to daisies, bells to baskets, baby cradles that rock to drop flowers, ducks and swans.

She enjoys meeting the people her hobby introduces her to and laughs at some of the experiences she has had, although they weren't as funny at the time.

On one occasion, a dark cake brought to her house for decorating, oozed rum daily. There's just no way the icing would attach itself to the rum-soaked cake. That's when Neil Gowan came to his wife's rescue with a "plywood" cake and it has solve many problems since.

When the centre section of a cake collapsed the day before the wedding, again an artificial section was iced and decorated and only the Gowans were any wiser.

Although the problems have been many, and varied, Mrs. Gowan says she's always been lucky enough to get a cake done. She says light cakes are the biggest headache, especially when they aren't properly cooked.

Her most challenging cake kept her up until 2 a.m. making maple leaves, that were just like glass. The leaves required curled edges to give the effect of having fallen off the tree and blown onto the cake.

"It was an involved one, it was different, but I finally got it," recalled Mrs. Gowan.

Her daughter, Dianne, made dolls clothes from early childhood. She could knit and crochet while a pre-schooler.

Although a guidance counsellor told her designing wouldn't lead to a job, Dianne was sold on taking the course after visiting an open house at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute.

"I can look at a piece of fabric and see what to make out of it. I especially like designing summer things. I've a million and one ideas for little daytime dresses."

Dianne is currently working on outfits for the band; casual safari suits in beige tones.

Her bedroom doubles as a work room and she has a wall lined with designs of her own. Her very first design was chosen for a designers' show that went all across Canada.

She has a cutting table, a sewing machine, rolls of pattern paper, pattern blocks and fabric all housed in her bedroom.

Her own designs include an Oriental gown in tones of oranges and reds, a navy slip dress with sheer jacket, a sun dress, a chemise, a bicycling suit and a white peplum style linen suit with silk-screened print blouse. The black silhouettes on the silk fabric were also Dianne's design.

Dianne enjoys hand-smocking her own designs, doing beadwork, stencil prints, tie dyeing or batik. She especially likes trapunto, which resembles quilting, and is currently working on stencil printed flowers in trapunto pots on a neutral colored fabric.

Her interests don't include selling, only designing. Already she has a sewer lined up to work with her. Her

sister Laura, Mrs. Bill McDonald of the Mildmay area, is willing to sew for Dianne.

Dianne admits that many ready made clothes drive her crazy, because of the shoddy workmanship. She also admits it's difficult to get many fall designs ahead at this time of year. She's busy helping with the haying.

Dave Gowan isn't sure what sparked his interest in leather. His father says it was skinning a pig and trying to tan the hide, but Dave isn't willing to concede.

His first belt combined the buckle off a horse harness with the strap of an old trunk. He made articles from leather scraps, used the money to buy equipment and now has several hundreds of dollars invested.

Dave has made quivers, for archers' bows, a doctor's bag, moccasins, sandals, key cases, purses, hair clips, sun visors, watch bands, almost anything that can be made from leather he's made.

Right now his big interest is footwear. He has just finished his first pair of shoes with negative heels. The shoes, done in two shades of leather, are his own design.

He has done harness repair, cut down a bridal to fit a pony and is now keen to try making a bridal.

Dave has mixed thoughts about a shop of his own. There are times he thinks he'd like to try it but the operation of a 200-acre-farm in co-operation with his father keeps him busy.

Where he once spent nearly all his spare time working in leather, he's now dividing his time between the band and refinishing floors and furniture in preparation for his upcoming marriage.

While in high school he played in a group called Faint Traces. His mother contends the name was erroneous because they were anything but faint.

He studied piano as a child but Dave had no formal training on drums. He tried a cousin's set, while visiting in the west in 1966 and took to them like a duck to water. He has been playing with Jim Patterson for more than two years. The group plays most weekends and usually one night during the week.

Dave's playing has also provided a new form of recreation for his father, Neil. It keeps Mr. Gowan busy dancing with his wife, daughter and future daughter-in-law.