

Hail and farewell to Hog Hill!

by Linda Sword

We're missing it already...It's just a few days since Hog Hill flipped over the "open" to "closed" sign for the last time, and there's a big gap in Rockwood's physical and psychic landscape.

Hog Hill was born in 1986...and like all works of art, it was generated from an idea mixed with enthusiasm. The idea was the witty artwork of Debbie Thompson-Wilson, which had always given great pleasure to Ann Kirwin, inspiring her to share her enthusiasm with the world. Little did she know that she would create a Rockwood touchstone, soon to be seen as a permanent fixture in the lives of the people of the region.

At first it was a quiet, mail-order business, selling unique stationery featuring Debbie Thompson-Wilson's designs...Ann, managing a hog farm with her husband Chandler Kirwin, a University of Guelph fine arts professor, had direct personal experience of the challenges of farming. She and Debbie, also a member of Guelph's Fine Arts Department at that time, created a dinner invitation with an eye-catching sketch illustrating the influential slogan: "Save the farmer...Eat, eat, eat!" Someone said, "Why don't you make a t-shirt?" She did, and sold 64 in an hour at the 1986 Pork Congress.

There followed an ad in the Globe and Mail, and a catalogue, and ultimately 60 designs that sold nationally and internationally on cards, t-shirts, sweatshirts, and anywhere else Ann could print them. The items were never distributed to other retailers...Rockwood had the monopoly on this brand of fun!

When, two years later, the mail-order business began to overwhelm family life on the farm, it spilled out into Ann's first retail/warehouse space in Rockwood, on the second floor of the "Candy Factory", where Scott's oak and pine furniture glows today. It was at this time, during the 1988 Olympics in Calgary, that Hog Hill became an international news item. A typical Hog Hill pig appeared on a sweatshirt, outfitted in, appropriately, a sweat suit. He (or she) carried a torch. Floating above the flame was the word "Olympigs". The International Olympic Commission, showing as usual no sense of humour, could not cope with this sacrilege, and sued what it must have perceived as a multinational Hog Hill. A box, one-foot thick, of legal papers appeared on the doorstep, demanding that the

entire Olympig sweatshirt stock be destroyed. The inventory (24 sweatshirts) trembled in their Rockwood packages while the lawyers argued. When the dust settled, and Hog Hill agreed out of court to cease and desist from selling them (a great relief, no doubt, to the IOC), each of the lawyers on both sides quietly, and we hope with a sense of irony, requested a souvenir Olympig sweatshirt of their own.

For the next five years Hog Hill went off to woo and win the crowds at the Royal Winter Fair. Meanwhile, in 1992, the store climbed up the Highway 7 hill into the building that is now the Celmins' eclectic Antique Emporium. Hog Hill had now truly graduated to "storefront" status, displaying a glorious medley of goods: stuffed animals in wonderfully unrealistic colours, eye-catching animal coffee mugs, irresistible greeting cards, the best for miles around, and every imaginable household or garden implement, all good excuses for a "laughing animal" motif. Hog Hill, Ann Kirwin and her two daughters, Elizabeth and Meghan, who often assisted in the shop, were planted firmly in Rockwood's imagination.

The animal population at Hog Hill continued to grow until, in 1996, the collection moved up to the crest of the hill and the heart of the town into the stone building which still houses lawyer Douglas Black. The landmark building across from St. John's Anglican Church holds a century and a quarter of history. All the businesses that have found a home here have been essential community services...just like Hog Hill. At the turn of the century, the building was Laing's General Store, later, a hardware store, a woodstove store, even a bridal shop and for a short time the studio for the Eden Mills artist, Harold Rice. Always a meeting place, the old plank floor creaks stories of generations of feet pausing in the midst of life's business to touch an item the heart is sure will fulfill a dream. Likewise, thousands of people have paused at Hog Hill, in person or through the mail, always finding something to lift their spirits.

In 1999, Hog Hill welcomed Cindy Hayes and her tack shop, The Old Nag, into the store. The number of horse lovers in the area had always been evident in Hog Hill's sales. The connection was perfect. (The Old Nag has now moved down the hill to the former premises of Jim's Repair Shop,

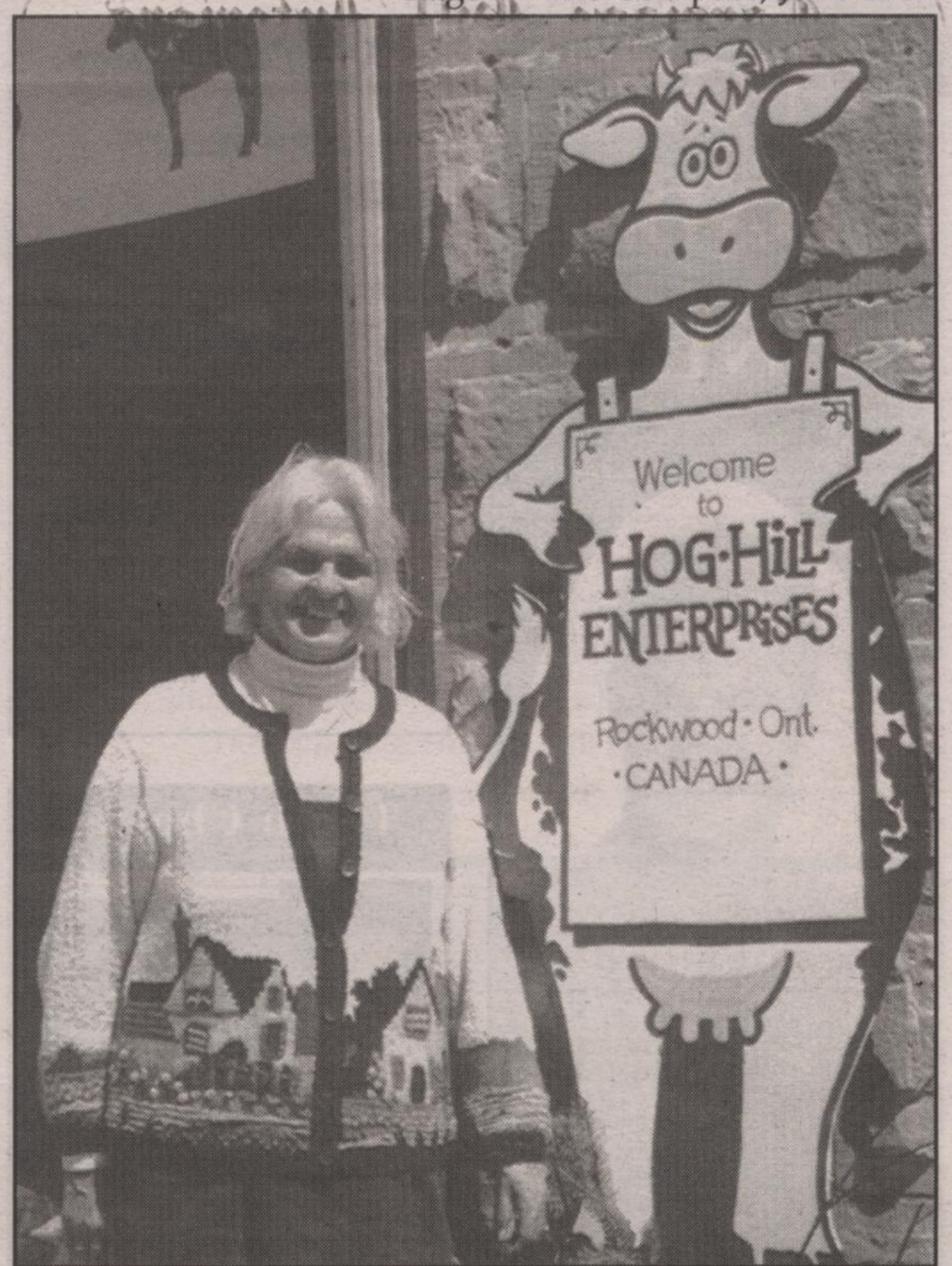
which is booming at the former site of Petty's Garage...another traditional Rockwood gathering place.)

It was Hog Hill's delight to find the whimsy in the farm life and animals that were the mainstay for this region. "Weed it and reap", "poultry in motion" or "stable personality" are examples of the wordplays that gave people the relief of laughter in a context which was specifically their own. Ann would say that the store was meant to be entertaining and that people really like to laugh. But Hog Hill's unique and honest atmosphere (no cloying potpourri here!) also took people beyond laughter...the store became a centre for a wonderful kind of spiritual re-alignment...a place the "world" could not enter, and where you dared to admit how much you really loved your cat. People met at Hog Hill, leaned on the counter, found themselves absent-mindedly gesturing with furry finger-puppets, and talked about what mattered most in the world to them. The wise and venerable Eramosa Crones were launched with the energy of Hog Hill, and Ann Snell of the former Full Circle Gallery.

Ann Kirwin took delight in poetry and playfulness, in every item on her shelves, and in each one of her customers. She took her time, gave us time, and took us out of time, sending us back into the rush of Highway 7, refreshed.

And that is why we are already missing Hog Hill. We know that Debbie Thompson-Wilson is still an active professional artist - and we watch for her shows. Coincidentally, she is participating in six-woman show with the inspirational theme of "Irises", on the weekend of June 9 and 10, 11 am to 6 pm, at 66 Manitoba Street in Guelph. Here her work is medieval miniatures.

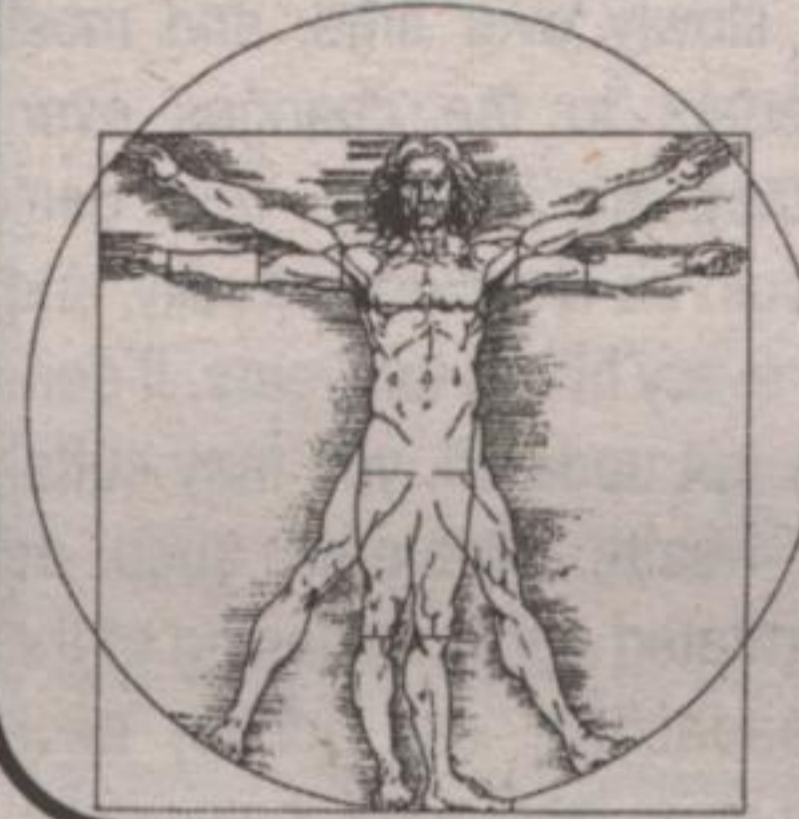
We also know that Ann Kirwin will surely continue to bring vital visions to us in new forms. We are lucky to have lived the 15-year creation that was Hog Hill, we thank her for sharing it with us, and we wish her new and fabulous flights of fancy.



Ann Kirwin

photo by Linda Sword

Dr. Tim Peloso, B.Sc.(H.K.), D.C. Rockwood Family Chiropractic



• Manual treatment for care and prevention of nerve, muscle, bone and joint pain

Happy Father's Day!
from Dr. Tim and Daphne

(519) 856-2624

118 Alma St. (Hwy 7 at Main St.)
Rockwood, ON N0B 2K0

BILL'S AUTO BODY SHOP

Working Harder to stay #1

Specializing in Insurance Claims

See you at

Showcase Milton 2001

Complete auto body & refinishing services
155 Nipissing Rd., Milton

905-878-2721



Ries Boers

Brookville Minor Baseball

Association standings as of May 23

| Pee Wee | |
|--------------|---|
| Games played | 5 |
| Wins | 2 |
| Loses | 3 |
| Tied | 0 |

| Mosquito | |
|--------------|---|
| Games played | 5 |
| Wins | 3 |
| Loses | 2 |
| Tied | 0 |

Picture Framing

In a relaxed Country Setting

Decorate your life or preserve your memories with our quality custom picture framing.

Limited Editions by Tricia Romance, Robert Bateman, Carl Brenders, Laura Berry, James Lumbers, Walter Campbell and many others

Original Artwork

In our Country Gallery

Corby Custom Framing

26 Carlisle Road
Carlisle On.
905-689-1976

By appointment or by chance

www.corbyframing.ca



Oyster & Wine Bar

Elegant fine dining

Flavours of Tuscany, France, or Canada.

We have a dining experience to tantalize every mood.

165 Main St. E., Milton • 905-693-8345

Hours: Mon to Fri Lunch & Dinner Sat Dinner Sun CLOSED

Catering for all occasions

