

A Woolly Good Time



The U.S. flag in this rug was made with strips of cloth cut from plaid wool.

WHILE FLIPPING THROUGH AN ARTICLE IN AN *ARCHITECTURAL Digest* some time in the late 1980s, Judy Long was captivated by some distinctive rugs featured in a story about Colonial homes. “I saw some rugs and I knew they weren’t braided rugs,” she says. “I knew they weren’t commercial rugs. I couldn’t figure out what they were!”

She was intrigued. Curiosity led Long to inquire about rug-making at a gift shop with a hooked-yarn rug on display. In response, they handed her the business card of Pat Chancey, a rug-hooking artist and instructor in Dallas.

Long lived in nearby Plano and quickly signed up for one of Chancey’s rug-hooking camps. There she bought the tools to make her first rug: a rug hook, wool, linen backing and a pattern. The pattern was small, but that first rug absorbed her until she completed it a few months later. Then, as the saying goes in rug-crafting circles, she was hooked.

Enthusiastic about her newfound hobby, Long invested in a

weeklong instructional rug-hooking camp in Jekyll Island, Georgia. She thoroughly enjoyed the class and attended others for several years while making some beautiful and finely detailed rugs. But all the while, Long kept saying to herself, “This is still not like what I saw in that old Colonial home.” Then she met some rug-hooking ladies at their antique dealership in Fort Worth. They’d hired a renowned primitive rug designer and hooker to conduct a private class in the Texas Hill Country.

In that Hill Country workshop, Long learned about the primitive rugs she first spied in the magazine and longed to make. It turned out the technique to make the primitive style is similar to that used for traditional rugs. The artist uses a linen or burlap backing and a rug hook to pierce and loop strips of wool material through the backing. Traditional rugs are made with thinner strands of wool to allow for meticulous shading that lends realism to the more formal designs of that style. For primitive rugs, however, a larger hook and much wider strips of



Judy Long of Lake Quitman has enjoyed the creative outlet of rug hooking since the late 1980s. While Long now works exclusively in the primitive style, she previously worked in the traditional style shown below.



wool cloth are used. The outcome is a looser rug, a look Long says she prefers. “This is more my style,” she says. “I’ve never had a fussy or formal living room. This style is more casual.”

There’s some debate about the roots of rug hooking in America, but many agree that it was a common practice among early settlers, usually women, to North America. Such women would weave these rugs in the evening by candlelight using a bent nail or other handmade tools. Their materials were scraps of wool cloth hooked through burlap salvaged from feed sacks and the like. Meant for daily use, these rugs were placed on drafty wood floors to keep the chill away or as bed covers during the coldest winter months.

Today, those old rugs are coveted among antique dealers, collectors and museums, and are considered prized folk art. Thus, many modern-day rug hookers like Long work hard to emulate the style and feel of the antiques. To do this, they often hand dye their wool in custom colors to imitate the fading of old rugs.

Nowadays, rug hooking is considered more of an art than a craft of the impoverished, and the colorful rugs aren’t so much utilitarian as they are decorative wall hangings. The craft has evolved from a necessity of the poor to a rather expensive



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Long's favorite rug is this Native American motif, which reminds her of growing up in Oklahoma, but she also enjoys drawing inspiration from nature.



hobby. Today's rug makers use specially built frames with grippers and magnets, costly high-tech cutting tools to precisely cut store-bought hand-dyed wool into strips, and ready-made specialty rug hooks. Some, though, will buy wool garments at thrift stores and even cut them by hand to save on expenses. Regardless of the method used, hooked rugs can be pricey. Depending on the time and materials put into them, prices can range from just over \$100 to thousands of dollars for larger ones.

Long's attraction to handicraft began when she was growing up and would cross-stitch, crochet and do needlework with her mom and sister. Today, she satisfies her creative spirit with her rug making. "It's so calming that no matter what is going on around you, you can just absorb yourself in creating a piece of art," she says. "Most of my rug hooking is after the day is settled and I'm sitting and watching TV."

She gets most of her supplies at A Nimble Thimble in Tyler, which also carries primitive rug patterns by Woolley Fox. The store also hosts many rug hooking workshops and "hook-ins"

throughout the year where crafters can learn from instructors and each other.

Long encourages those interested in the craft to give it a try, but she warns, "It's not the least expensive hobby that you can have by any means. But it's so worthwhile!" She loves the camaraderie of the workshops and hook-ins she attends—the fellowship of 15 or 20 women all sitting together and each hooking a different design. "You never have to look up, but we all talk and laugh," she says. While she appreciates the art, she says she also enjoys the community. Above all else, she says, "It's the making of it that intrigues me."

Those interested in talking with Long about rug hooking and seeing some of her beautiful work can attend The Country Fall Gathering Antique Show, Oct 19–20, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at 7644 FM 16 West, just east of Lindale. She also recommends membership in the Association of Traditional Hooking Artists, where she is a member and was the newsletter editor for 18 years.

Judy Long and her husband, Tony Redondo, live at Lake Quitman and are members of Wood County Electric Cooperative.



One Lucky Student Will Win an Action-Packed Trip to DC

ONE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT FROM WOOD COUNTY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE'S NINE-county service territory can win an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington, D.C., by applying now! The Government-in-Action Youth Tour is a youth leadership program sponsored by WCEC and organized by Texas Electric Cooperatives and the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. The trip is June 6–15.

About 145 high school students and chaperones from across Texas will spend more than a week together immersed in what past participants have called a memorable and life-changing experience. The Texas delegates begin the trip with a full day in Austin, which includes a guided tour of the Texas Capitol, a picnic on the Capitol grounds and a visit to the Bullock Texas State History Museum. Then the group jets off to Washington to meet with more than 1,700 fellow delegates from other states for a jam-packed trip of a lifetime!

Highlights of the D.C. visit include meeting congressional leaders and visiting numerous national monuments and historic sites such as the Supreme Court and Library of Congress; Washington National Cathedral; Arlington National Cemetery; George Washington's home at Mount Vernon; the Smithsonian Institution and Holocaust Memorial Museum; the Jefferson, Lincoln and Franklin Delano Roosevelt memorials; the Vietnam, World War II and Korean War memorials; and the Washington Monument.

To apply, candidates should download the official application at wcec.org under the Community tab and submit a 450- to 500-word essay (about one typed page). The essay will be judged by an independent panel. This year's topic is "My Cooperative and What It Brings to the Region."

Be creative and have fun. WCEC powers lives to include necessities and conveniences. In 1938, the founders of WCEC could not have dreamed of the possibilities. Just look at all the things electricity powers: convenience, necessity, fun and just plain comfort. Have fun as you think about and describe how WCEC powers the lives around you.

Eligibility

To be eligible, an applicant must:

- ▶ Be an area high school junior or senior.
- ▶ Be a dependent of a WCEC member.
- ▶ Have permanent resident status in WCEC's service territory.
- ▶ Be a citizen of the United States.

Qualified entries must arrive at WCEC by **11:59 p.m., February 21.**

Don't Hang That Sign!

THERE ARE MORE THAN 130 MILLION wooden utility poles in the United States, estimates the North American Wood Pole Council. That ample vertical real estate may look appealing when you need somewhere to hang your sign, deer stand, basketball hoop, clothesline or satellite dish.

Don't make that mistake. Attaching items to utility poles is not only illegal, it's dangerous, too.

It may seem innocent, but one pin-hole from a tack, nail or staple lodged in a pole can pierce a lineworker's glove, stripping away critical protection from thousands of volts of electricity. Obstructions also can impede lineworkers' ability to climb and inspect poles.

Anyone placing items on poles also risks exposing themselves to thousands of volts of electricity. This is especially true of structures anchored to poles. It's always wise to keep any structure at least 10 feet away from utility poles.

Please help Wood County EC keep our linemen—and our community—safe. Don't attach unauthorized, dangerous items to our poles.

