

grand prize

2003

By Gary Snyder

stitch-off winners shine

Every year, Stitch-Off showcases the best and brightest embroidery from around the world. This year's stellar entries were dazzling.

IRISH DANCING DRESS

*Nancy McIntyre
Ocean Promotion Inc.
Victoria, B.C.*

For more information, see page 7.



creativity prize

This year's event, *Stitches'* 17th annual Stitch-Off, drew fewer entries than last, but the exhibited work was no less impressive. Some contestants continued their categorical domination; others demonstrated their sewing skills over several styles. And some common themes were expressed, from lilies to weddings, from Native American culture to Harley-Davidson hogs. Many competitors remarked they are already planning for the 2004 Stitch-Off, while wondering how they will surpass this year's submissions.

The capable collection of judges consisted of Coloradans Joyce Yost of Digitalflash in Golden; Scott Stengel of Punch Express, also in Golden; and Cindy Tackenberg from Faithworks LLC in Castle Rock. Winners were evaluated based on creativity, technical execution, use of color, suitability of design and overall appeal.

Unanimous selection for Grand Prize was the "Irish Dancing Dress" offered by Nancy McIntyre at Ocean Promotion Inc., Victoria, B.C. Comments on the complex piece, which also took first place in the Fashion category, cited it for being well-planned and beautifully sewn, incorporating multimedia, and displaying a variety of needlework skills. For her efforts, McIntyre receives a Pulse Maestro Digitizing Software package from Pulse Microsystems in Mississauga, Ont.

Nancy Sedar Designs' second-place winner in the Home Furnishings category caught the Creativity award with "Lily Pads & Koi." The multidimensional wall hanging snagged Sedar Sherman an EOS Creator software package, thanks to Compucon USA, in Greensboro, N.C.

The popular People's Choice award will be decided at Embroidery Mart in Nashville in mid-August and will garner the winner a Wings XP ProVersion 1.50 software package, courtesy of Wings Systems Ltd., Thessaloniki, Greece.

First-place winners in each embroidery category received a \$500 gift certificate from the following industry suppliers: Anvil Knitwear Inc., New York; The Embroidery Store, Greensboro, N.C.; Embroidery Unlimited, Tempe, Ariz.; Great Notions, Dallas; Gunold USA Inc., Kennesaw, Ga.; Hirsch International Corp., Hauppauge, N.Y.; Madeira USA, Laconia, N.H.; and Robison-Anton Textile Co., Fairview, N.J. Once again, Dalco Athletic Lettering in Dallas is awarding its Stock Stitch IV software and a \$200 gift certificate to the winner of the Appliqué category. Second-place winners in each category receive \$100 from *Stitches Magazine*; third-place winners are awarded \$75. ■

Gary Snyder is a Denver-based freelancer who writes regularly for *Stitches Magazine*.



LILY PADS & KOI

*Nancy Sedar Sherman & Ira Sherman
Nancy Sedar Designs
Denver*

For more information, see page 9.

accessories



HAIR ON AIR

**Loredana Mariana and
Antonello Ascione
AMG Progetti Industriali di
Antonello Ascione
Naples, Italy**

Self-described as a “funny aeroplane,” this whimsical winner is another overtly original design from the pair of Italian embellishers who topped the category, and the competition, last year. “I love airplanes, I have [piloted over] 1,200 helicopter hours,” says the creator of this colorful biplane.

The high-flying hairpiece was embroidered on a Melco Amaya using Madeira polyneon and Nakamura metallic threads, and it logs a few hundred thousand stitches. The flight plan took 15 hours, another six to draw out, four for punching, three to paint and assemble, finally landing at the competition in its own felt “hangar” to complete the transcontinental journey. ■



2nd



BASKET OF TOWELS

**Lisa Calder
Hardrock Embroidery, Vidor, Texas**

“I decorated my girlfriend’s lake house and thought it was a neat entry for the competition,” says Lisa Calder, whose second place presentation was simple but effective. Starting with Great Notions stock designs, the six-hour project combined both cutaway and tearaway backing, Isacord 40 thread, Solvy and odds and ends from around the shop. The 50,000 stitches which comprise elements of her bed-and-breakfast basket were embroidered on a Melco EMT 10/4T CE machine.

appliqué



ORANGE LILIES

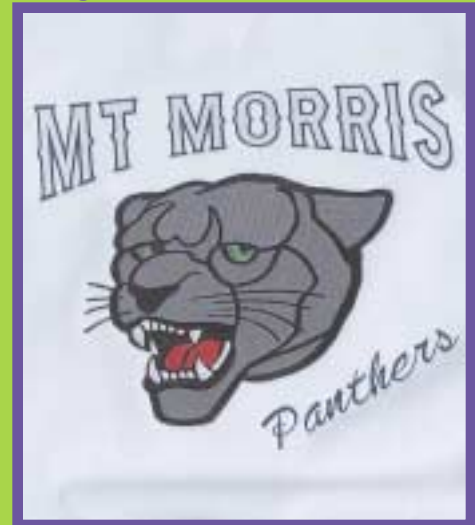
Lana Rabinovich
Fine Embroidery Inc.
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Real flowers were the inspiration for this Russian immigrant's winning entry. "I love lilies so much," says Lana Rabinovich, who has offered her unique perspective to this country for the past eight years. "And when I saw some beautiful lilies, I thought that is what I should do for the contest."

Her more than 15 years of experience in hand-stitching allowed her to draw the three-dimensional design in a mere 15 minutes and embroider it in about four hours. Rabinovich used silk organza, silk thread and wire to fabricate the delicate arrangement on her Singer treadle machine. ■



2nd



SWEATSHIRT WITH PANTHER

Martha Brown

Monogramming by Martha, Clio, Mich.

Runner-up honors in this category went to Martha Brown for her original design intended to be "something different to wear for school." The piece was digitized by Jim Brownell at Midwest Punch Inc. in Au Gres, Mich. and sewn on a Tajima machine using Madeira thread, foam, cutaway backing and material from Fabric Fair. The 47,188 stitches took two hours to sew.

3rd



T-SHIRT WITH FLAG

Martha Brown

Monogramming by Martha, Clio, Mich.

Brown also secured third place in this category using the same machine and material to more solemn effect. A collector of flag items, she was compelled to make a shirt to commemorate the events of September 11. The 19,000-stitch standard was digitized by Shari Loveless and took Brown an hour to embroider.

cap



RAMBOW OUTFITTERS HERITAGE WRAP

Jamie Iverson
Rambow Inc., New London, Minn.

Rambow covered this category, taking all three prizes with their signature Cap Wraps. The idea for the all-around headpiece that won first place was to display traditional wildlife in an American landscape, according to Jamie Iverson.

The hat sports an eagle, a wolf and a buffalo (the layout of the latter against its background being the most problematic). It was designed in Punto and stitched on a Tajima machine using Madeira thread and a tearaway backing. Iverson's digitizing effort was intermittent, but took 24 hours, roughly an hour per 1,000 stitches, and another hour to embroider. ■

2nd



RAMBOW PATRIOTIC WRAP

Jamie Iverson
Rambow Inc., New London, Minn.

Also designed in Punto and stitched on the Tajima, "the 'We the People' cap was part of a series of designs we did, all based on the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center," says Iverson. He again used Madeira thread and tearaway backing for this 14,022-stitch flag wrap which required eight hours to digitize, 20 minutes to sew and a little finesse to avoid puckering.

3rd



AMERICAN MOTORCYCLE

Jamie Iverson
Rambow Inc., New London, Minn.

Rambow completed its sweep of the cap category with this Harley-Davidson reproduction. Created for a client, the bike is also displayed on a coordinating jacket back, "so the two really look great together," says Iverson, who became quite familiar with the image. Created in Punto and embroidered on a Barudan machine with Madeira thread and a tearaway backing, the 9,847-stitch motorcycle took six hours to design and 15 minutes to sew.

children's wear



FRIENDS

Marion L. Cornett
m.c. designs
Fowlerville, Mich.

“I have always loved kids’ wear and enjoyed designing it,” says Marion Cornett. “When I discovered these in a clip art pack, I thought how great they would look on toddler’s clothing.” Her enthusiasm shows in her winning outfits populated with funky and fun animal images.

She used a super heavyweight backing for softness and Madeira thread to embellish the jumper and “shortalls,” over 55,000 stitches each, on a 15-needle, singlehead Tajima. Cornett spent about half an hour per animal digitizing and two hours per piece embroidering. Placement was the primary issue with the shortalls, as some of the fanciful “Friends” spanned the seams. ■



2nd



LOVING GIRAFFES

Beverly Field

Artistic Embroidery Digitizing, Vancouver, B.C.
This cuddly concept was designed by Dawn Charles at St. Lawrence Textiles in Montreal as part of a fashion line for children. Beverly Field digitized the 5,345 stitches, which subsequently were sewn on a Tajima machine using Ackermann thread, in about half an hour.

3rd



HAPPY LION

Beverly Field

Artistic Embroidery Digitizing, Vancouver, B.C.
Artistic Digitizing continued the “simple but creative” kid’s fashion theme with this cheerful third-place winner. The 4,149-stitch lion, also designed by Dawn Charles and sewn on a Tajima machine with Ackermann thread, took Field only 25 minutes to punch.



IRISH DANCING DRESS

Nancy McIntyre
Ocean Promotion Inc.
Victoria, B.C.

Nancy McIntyre was engaged in this Grand prize-winning endeavor for over a year (conservatively), investing 30 hours digitizing and 18 hours embroidering the half a million stitches. Another 30 hours were spent in assembly with a customer who made the dress as a competition costume for her daughter.

The colorful velvet and silk dress incorporates some 50 multi-layer appliqué as well as feathers, rhinestones and other fancy fabrics to enhance the mystical appearance of the dragons, each of which is covered in custom-embroidered “crocheted” lace to replicate scales. McIntyre relied mainly on metallic thread for the overall effect. She minimized use of this more expensive filament by first sewing a color-coordinated layer of rayon beneath.

“For me,” says the victorious McIntyre, “it’s like running a marathon. You train and don’t necessarily enter to win, but just to finish.” This race, she won. ■

2nd



NATIVE AMERICAN BUCKSKIN DRESS

Lisa Calder
Hardrock Embroidery, Vidor, Texas

“‘Hardrock’ is from my husband’s Indian heritage; [it is] his name and his grandfather’s name,” says Calder of her inspiration for her second-place piece. “It is a tribute to them.”

The authentic leather dress was embroidered by Calder and assembled by Joy Johnson at Joyful Creations in Churchill, Tenn. Starting with stock designs from Great Notions and Dakota Collectibles, it took a week to embellish more than 350,000 stitches along the edges of the hand-tanned hide.

3rd



CUSTOM-MADE TEAM JACKET

Harris Birken
The Winning Team, Valencia, Calif.

The Winning Team showed its prowess by taking third place with its original and fashionable jacket design. Sewn on a Tajima TMEX III Bridge Machine, the more than 200,000 stitches took four hours to embroider using Ackermann Isacord thread and a cutaway backing.

“We have been the clothing manufacturer for Yamaha of Troy (Ohio) since 1995,” says digitizer Harris Birken, “and we try to manufacture eye-catching garments to be worn at [motorcycle] races.”

framed



GEISHA

*Staff
Strawberry Stitch Co.
St. Louis*

“Every project we work on is pretty much a team effort,” according to Tom Moore, and this winning piece was no different. Beginning with a fine art concept, everyone pitched in researching the topic and contributing to the design. The washed background was accomplished by drizzling watercolor down an artboard. The Geisha was drawn on a clear acetate film and layed over the background before being rendered with almost 105,000 stitches on a Melco EMC 10T.

Allowing that human anatomy is extremely difficult to produce realistically in thread, Moore points to the subtle shadings of the lips, nose and eyes that make the art appear photographic. ■



2nd



SGT. PEPPER'S ALBUM COVER

*Jim Bond & Delia Frazee
Cheyenne River, Lenexa, Kan.*

This homage was digitized by Jim Bond and embroidered by Delia Frazee. Sewn on a Tajima 18-head machine it consists of over 145,000 stitches, countless color changes, black tearaway backing, and both Madeira and Robison-Anton thread. This faithful rendition of the cover of one of rock's finest albums of all time took more than "A Day in the Life" (35 hours to be exact), and it was undertaken by Bond because he "thought it would be fun."

3rd



END OF TRAIL

*Stephanie Osborne, Steve Ellington & Tammy Harris
Stitchmaster LLC, Greensboro, N.C.*

Inspiration for this colorful portrayal was provided by a piece of art that belonged to Steve Ellington's deceased aunt. Living at the site of a departed culture and collecting artifacts as a hobby further fueled Ellington's native creativity. It took him four hours to draft and digitize the design; Tammy Harris embroidered the 77,663-stitch image. The piece is adorned with such natural embellishments as suede, rawhide, wild turkey feathers and wooden beads. The sycamore limb frame adds to the intrinsic symbolism of a hide being stretched in the sun.



SANTA OFF-SEASON

Sherrill Hardcastle & Cheryl Hildebrand
Monograms Unlimited
 Lebanon, Mo.

The team of Hardcastle and Hildebrand rose from a third-place finish last year with this amusing take on Santa's vacation activities. "I saw the cute designs in the Great Notions catalog and the light bulb went on," says Hardcastle, whose shop specializes in quilts. The trick, much like storyboarding a movie, is in the planning.

Initially, they drew out the quilt block, then picked a display pattern, drew the designs, colored them with crayons, made copies and placed them on the simulation before committing to embellishing the final product. The quilt itself required approximately 130,000 stitches and 16 hours of sewing time on a Happy 4-head machine. ■



2nd



LILY PADS & KOI

Nancy Sedar Sherman & Ira Sherman
Nancy Sedar Designs, Denver

A collaborative effort with her artist husband won Sedar Sherman the Creativity award as well as second place in this category. "The whole idea is that you are looking at a pond, through the lily pads to the koi below," says Sedar Sherman. She used clear rods to suspend the lilies on a fiberglass screen a couple of inches above the organza fish appliqués to enhance the sense of depth. The large layered design took her some 80 hours to refine with another 12 hours allotted for execution. Almost 250,000 stitches were sewn on a Tajima machine using Ackermann thread. The artist avoided potential puckering on the screen by lowering the density and using double run stitches to help support it.

3rd



LILY PILLOW

Joel J. Rapp
Bison Embroidery, Williamsville, N.Y.

With this winning entry, Rapp "wanted to make something nice for my wife, Lisa," who later described his effort as "simple and elegant." He achieved this reaction by picking matching material and cording for a pair of pillows, choosing complementary threads and opting for three panels rather than just one.

The project, a distinct artistic departure for Rapp, took 20 hours and 54,421 stitches on his trusty Tajima.

jacket back



IRON TIGER

Joel J. Rapp
Bison Embroidery
Williamsville, N.Y.

Rapp indulged himself and emerged a repeat winner in this category. "I am a classic car enthusiast and I own two of the three cars portrayed on the jacket," he confesses. "But the 30-hour project was so detailed that it couldn't be achieved alone."

He commissioned Jon Aroix to prepare the art for the design and enlisted the aid of his friend Bella to affix the chenille center of the tiger's face and the black leather striping on the sleeves. The some 286,000 stitches, sewn on a Tajima TMEX-C1501 using Robison-Anton thread, do not include her chenille and sleeve work. ■



2nd



THUNDER CYCLES

Roy Massen

ARTEch digitizing, Geyserville, Calif.

Massen, who tied for second in this category last year, interpreted an original airbrush painting by Eddie Trotta, the designer of custom Harley-Davidson Thunder Cycles, to stand alone in this year's competition. The 315,000 stitches, spanning back, sleeve and left-chest art, took 25 hours to design and digitize, and another seven hours to sew. Massen embroidered the jacket on his SWF 1201C 12-needle, singlehead machine using King Star thread and Madeira Ezee-Cut backing.

3rd



HARLEY-DAVIDSON 100TH ANNIVERSARY

Beverly Field

Artistic Embroidery Digitizing, Vancouver, B.C.

It is only fitting that Harleys dominate this category as this uniquely American motorcycle marks a century of existence. "The theme behind this limited edition jacket is to capture the gleaming chrome and polished aluminum feel of a Harley-Davidson motorcycle," according to Beverly Field. It took approximately five hours to digitize the design, which was embroidered with Gunold thread on a Tajima machine by Hamilton Sportswear Co. Ltd. in Vancouver.

knit shirt



HEAD DOG LOGO

*Oscar Battle, Jr. & Paradise Embroidery
Creative Designs—
A Digitizing & Graphic
Arts Co.
Miami*

Recognition for top dog in this category goes to Oscar Battle for his left-chest logo. "I like dogs and wanted to come up with a cool saying to put on a shirt, and it was pretty simple," says the digitizer, who reports that it sewed out beautifully the first time.

The 10,929 stitches, which took two hours to digitize (not including reprogramming them, thanks to an untimely computer crash), were sewn on a Brother singlehead by Paradise Embroidery in a little over an hour. Madeira thread and a cutaway backing were used. ■

2nd



CREATIVE DESIGNS LOGO

*Oscar Battle, Jr. & Paradise Embroidery
Creative Designs—A Digitizing & Graphics Arts Co.
Miami*

Battle's own logo, which also came out first try, registered second best with the judges. His motivation in this case was the need for a different, yet interesting, logo that expresses the name of his company and the service it performs.

The obviously original design took an hour and a half to digitize and three-quarters of an hour to sew. It, too, was embroidered with Madeira thread and a cutaway backing.

multimedia



LIQUID AFTERBURNER

Beverly Field
Artistic Embroidery Digitizing
Vancouver, B.C.

This winning multimedia piece “was quite straight-forward from an embroidery perspective,” says digitizer Beverly Field. Conceived for the snowboard division owned by ski manufacturer K2, the incorporation of flashing fiber optic lights lends a novel high-tech look designed to further increase brand recognition among the more fashion-conscious shredders.

It took Field about an hour and fifteen minutes to digitize the 37,533-stitch abstracted image, which was sewn on a Tajima embroidery machine by WActive Wear Inc. in Fort Worth, Texas. ■

2nd



WEDDING INVITATION

Robyn Noble-West
Sewgrafik LLC, Roswell, Ga.

Robyn Noble-West's entry is a multimedia piece in the truest sense of the word, and she didn't have to look very far for her inspiration for this second place winner. Her own wedding was the motivation for a uniquely original approach, which was comprised not only of the invitation and response cards, but also a gift CD containing music by her groom and his jazz quintet.

The nuptial package took about two days to assemble with the 4,300- and 6,000-stitch designs sewn on a Tajima single-head using Madeira thread.

single-color design



M.C. ESCHER'S "RELATIVITY"

Dave Womack
Custom Chenille Embroidery, Dallas

"It worked well, but it was not fun," says Dave Womack of his second successive winner in this category. Replicating the famous lithograph was suggested by a friend and taken as a challenge by Womack. He spent 120 hours digitizing and eight hours sewing the nearly 190,000-stitch piece on satin material.

Not only did Womack capture the look and feel of the original art, but he did it with a single thread and no trims—a technical achievement that renders an already complex image even more befuddling. It took him over a year of his own time to complete the extensive project, which he then finished with a custom shadowbox frame. ■



2nd



AQUA COCKTAIL DRESS

Maritha de Werk
Dutch Embroidery Corner, Suisun City, Calif.
Her son's wedding was the inspiration for this modest yet tasteful runner-up. Maritha de Werk embroidered each panel of the dress, sewing a total of over 150,000 stitches on her Melco EMT 10T system. She used Superior and variegated metallic thread on the satin dress to add to its shimmer. Each of the streamers on the backside had to be hooped twice to accommodate the entire design.

stock design



BEACH BOY & GIRL E-DOLLS

*Beverly Fields
Artistic Embroidery Digitizing
Vancouver, B.C.*

“E” embraces several meanings in this successful summer season design. Starting as small toys that Beverly Fields’ pre-school daughter could carry in her mandatory “E”arthquake “E”mergency Kit, a series of “E”mbroidered doll patterns are now available through “E”lectronic commerce on the Internet.

Each E-Doll kit comes with detailed instructions and averages about 3,000 stitches. It takes roughly two and a half hours to sew the front, back and border programs. Fields relied on Gunold thread and a Tajima machine to assemble these two “E”dorable winners. ■



2nd



SATIN COCKTAIL DRESS

*Maritha de Werk
Dutch Embroidery Corner, Suisun City, Calif.*

Maritha de Werk started with a Great Notions stock design and made modifications by moving elements to different locations and occasionally laying a run stitch underneath so the sewing would run smoothly. In some instances, she left areas out altogether, depending on where the design needed to be embroidered on the dress.

sweatshirt



WOLF & SHIMMERING MOON

*Stephanie Osborne,
Phil Pierce and Tammy Harris
Stitchmaster LLC
Greensboro, N.C.*

Phil Pierce started with clear monofilament thread and switched to a clear plastic film to achieve the desired effect with this winner based on wildlife photography. "It wasn't shiny enough," says the digitizer, "the thread blended in too much."

Tammy Harris stitched across the substitute media with the clear monofilament and the film was torn away to produce the sparkling backdrop. The 40,000-stitch design also used Madeira rayon thread and a tearaway backing. It took a full day's work to realize. Pierce allows that while his composite scene may not weather well in the wash, it does embellish the possibilities. ■

2nd



GHOSTLY MANOR HAUNTED HOUSE LOGO

*Renee Matthews
Pelz Lettering Inc., Sandusky, Ohio*

This original design was digitized and embroidered by Renee Matthews, who serves as the manager at Ghostly Manor and helped design its ghoulish logo. It was embroidered on a Brother machine using Madeira rayon thread and a 3 oz. cutaway backing. The 110,495-stitch horror shirt ultimately devoured some three hours of her life.

3rd



HARLEY-DAVIDSON SWEATSHIRT

*Beverly Field
Artistic Embroidery Digitizing, Vancouver, B.C.*

The intent of this third-place winner was to trace the historical route of the original Harley-Davidson design incorporating hand-cut lettering from the 1940s, according to Beverly Field. The 37,000 stitches, which took her an hour to digitize, were sewn locally by Hamilton Sportswear Co. Ltd. on a Barudan machine using Gunold thread and backing.

t-shirt



TWENTY-SIX DOLPHINS

Joel J. Rapp
Bison Embroidery
Williamsville, N.Y.

“I wanted to create a unique all-over design that spliced two different colored T-shirts together,” says Rapp, who was inspired by his 4-year-old daughter, Cecilia. Building on his winning raptor rendering in this category last year, Rapp kept the design simple, but this time extended the image all the way around the shirt.

The buoyant dolphins necessitated four sewing attempts and tallied a deceptive 50,108 stitches. The entire project took 10 hours to complete and required five hoopings to effect the proper flow. ■

2nd



JUST HANGING

Oscar Battle, Jr.
Creative Designs—A Digitizing & Graphics Arts Co.
Miami

Also keeping this entry “in the family,” Oscar Battle says his second-place winner was inspired by his girlfriend. “Just Hanging” is her standard response whenever he asks what she is doing.

The original design was sewn on a 6-head Tajima by Paradise Embroidery, Coral Springs, Fla., using Madeira thread and a cutaway backing.

