



## D a v i d A p p a l a c h i a n C r a f t s

Perhaps ironically, a group of Catholic brothers from Philadelphia and a woman volunteer from Michigan, Mary Pineau, provided the drive for the formation of David Appalachian Crafts of David, Kentucky — a nonprofit cooperative retail outlet for a variety of crafts produced

in over seventy homes in seven counties of eastern Kentucky.

It is a common story in Appalachia — diminishing coal markets shut down coal mines and tipples, shutting off the primary source of income for eastern Kentucky families. A family's choices at that point are simple — leave Appalachia for jobs elsewhere, or try to find a new source of income

in a land of limited opportunities.

The creative vision and resourcefulness of the founders of David Appalachian Crafts led to the development of an alternative — a chain of "cottage craft industries" scattered throughout the mountains and hollows of eastern Kentucky. Training was conducted by the David staff, and the opening of new crafts markets focused attention on the many talents showcased at the David Crafts Center.

Although the coop at David sells crafts of all types, it has gained national recognition for its quilts and weavings. In 1984, while my husband was governor, the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee commissioned David to produce a quilt design containing the official logo of the 1984 Olympics. Daniel Petrie, director of the film *The Dollmaker*, commissioned one of David's quilters, Polly Justice, to design and make a double-wedding-ring quilt which he then presented to Jane Fonda as a remembrance of their making the film together here in Kentucky. In 1982, Johnny

Carson commissioned David to produce four hundred quilted pillow covers in various shades of blue. Twenty-three crafts-women worked diligently to fill the largest single order the group had ever received, and each pillow cover met David's high quality standards and bore a tag with the name of the particular craftswoman who made it.

My own personal treasure from David was presented to John and me as a Christmas gift in 1982. The governor's office staff commissioned the quilters at David to design and make an original quilt which contained twelve blocks, each one depicting a significant place or event in our lives. Six women worked on the quilt for over five months — designing it, piecing it together, appliqueing, embroidering, and quilting the double-size quilt. It was one of the most memorable gifts we have ever received.

The markets for crafts produced by David craftspeople may sometimes seem sophisticated, but the crafts are most popular for their simplicity — all handmade quilts,

baskets, chairs, pottery, corn-shuck dolls, and Christmas decorations.

*David Appalachian Crafts is a little goldmine of employment, permitting talented craftspeople to keep their homes and hearts in the mountains of Kentucky.*

*We interviewed Director Sharon Berger at David on a spring afternoon.*

In the 1940s and 1950s David was a booming town, but in the late 1960s, the coal company pulled out. When the town was struggling with what was going to happen, a group of Catholic brothers from Philadelphia came and started St. Vincent's mission, the umbrella organization of David Crafts. They helped the town begin to ask, "What do we do now that the coal company is no longer here?" They helped us create a development corporation, so we could get federal grants to put in a sewer system and to get some housing so we wouldn't lose everything that had been here. They opened a day-care center; they had educational programs. They tried to continue some of the things that the coal company was doing, but to help the people become independent.

One of the volunteers at that time, Mary Pineau, started the craft program. Mary was from Michigan. She was here for about ten years. She started the program as sewing classes in 1971. She took her sewing machines, threw them in her car and traveled to teach classes. One of the first places she went was Drift, which is about twenty miles from here. She started discovering some of the talent that was

***Historians say that in 1767 Daniel Boone followed a buffalo trail up Middle Creek in Floyd County and discovered a salt lick at Lick Fork, where the town of David now stands.***







here — the quilting and the basket making and the woodworking.

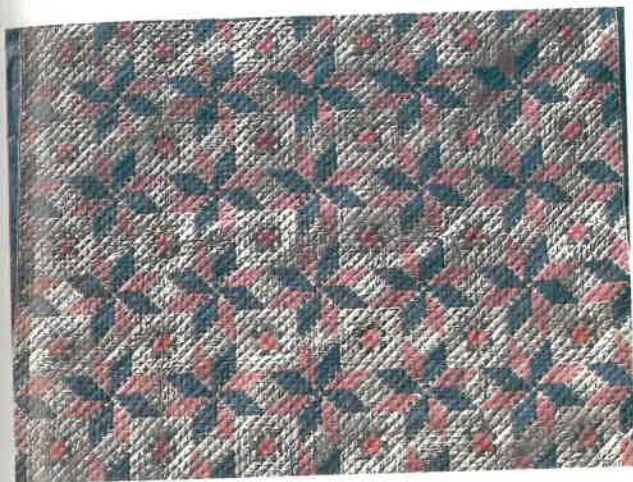
Here at David, we sell quilts, baskets, wooden items of all sorts. Right now we only have one local potter, so we are buying some things from someone in Morehead. We buy our spoons from Virginia Petty because we only have one person locally who does spoons and we can't keep enough of them here. Roy May is a wonderful woodworker who makes things for us. He is not too far from here. We have some artists. Tom Whittaker, from Magoffin County, teaches at Prestonsburg Community College and does watercolors for us. We have lots of quilters. Polly Justice is one of our best quilters. She doesn't live too far from here, just seven or eight miles. She does not quilt with a frame, she quilts with a hoop, and she loves talking to people. Her husband, Buck, used to make beautiful hickory-bark chairs.

Our basket makers, Colleen and Orville Messers, are wonderful. They are a great family. Their skill has been passed down for generations. Colleen also has a little weaving room in her home and many of the rugs and place mats we have here are hers. Their children are all in college or away or married right now, but they have all been involved in making things. Colleen and Orville bark chairs and stools, too. Jim Conley whittles in coal and does walking sticks. He carves faces from these little chunks of coal.

Our philosophy is that we are not necessarily here to make money, but for some people that is an important part of what we do. We just try to help people supplement their income and be proud of their work. The crafts center was first started to give people an outlet to sell their crafts — a reason to come out of their homes to meet people. Over the years a lot of that has been maintained. We have potluck sup-



## TEXTILES AND QUILTS



pers about every other month and we always try to have a party at Thanksgiving and Christmas. We get together for special occasions. We try to celebrate together and share in each others' lives.

We are not just a place of business where people bring their things. We try to create as social and as pleasant an atmosphere as

possible for people. Quilting and sewing are the skills we teach to people. We feel we are able to help younger people learn skills, and to help longtime quilters improve their skills, so that they can really sell what they are making.

Two-thirds of our people — at times as high as three-fourths of our people — are

***ABOVE: The David quilt presented by the governor's office staff to the Browns for Christmas, 1982.***

women. There is some wonderful talent here that often needs to be discovered and encouraged and helped along a little bit. I feel that what we are about is bringing out the talent and the beauty that is here.