

Missouri Folk Arts Program

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For nearly thirty years, the Missouri Folk Arts Program (MFAP) has coordinated and co-produced workshops, concerts, festivals, fairs, tours, demonstrations, and narrative stages that featured the artistic excellence of Missouri's traditional artists. This year, MFAP funded two mid-Missouri teams in the Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program (TAAP), along with six other teams across the state. This spring, TAAP teams performed and demonstrated at the state capitol, a welcome center, a senior center, a regional festival, and a cultural conference. With the mid-Missouri teams, however, MFAP staff had the opportunity to program events in downtown Columbia as part of Artrageous Fridays, a quarterly celebration of local businesses and the arts. On April 25th, master twined rug weaver Irene Livingston and her apprentice Gretchen Seifert set up shop at the Columbia Art League gallery on Ninth Street to demonstrate their unusual weaving technique. A few blocks away, Broadway

Brewery, one home of a growing hand-crafted beer movement in Columbia, hosted fiddling team John P. Williams and his apprentice Robert Cathey. Kenny Applebee, an accomplished—dare we say, legendary—guitarist, provided rhythm.

At Columbia Art League, Livingston and Seifert set up two large looms near the gallery's large windows. The weavers also placed smaller looms nearby for visitors to try their hands at twining. Livingston, Seifert, and gallery visitors were surrounded by works from a special exhibition called *Elemental*, where each piece was based on the periodic table. Livingston first met Seifert at the Columbia Weavers and Spinners Guild in 2012. As an experienced weaver, Seifert had experimented with twining rugs was intrigued by the process, and wished to learn more. Traditionally, rug-twining is a working class art form. Livingston explains that the history of rug-twining goes back to the Industrial Revolution, a time when very few people could afford to

buy new clothes every season or replace household necessities. During that time, Livingston notes, nothing went to waste. When people wore holes in their clothes, women stripped the undamaged fabric down to make functional objects, like rugs. Each finished rug takes about twenty hours to complete, but Livingston says it is enjoyable work. "You don't just sit around not doing anything productive," she said, smiling. "You can sit around visiting or watching TV, but you better be working." Several visitors at the Columbia Art League tried their hands at twining, and a few asked Livingston to hold a local workshop for beginners.

At Broadway Brewery, Williams, Cathey, and Applebee were tapping their feet and sawing away at their instruments. Watching these musicians play is mesmerizing; they are living libraries of old-time music tunes. Cathey, the apprentice, brought a set list to refer to, but he only needed the first few notes of a tune, if that, to join the song. The trio met in Hallsville, Mo., at the monthly jam and square dance, still held every second Saturday of the month. The local fiddling community is tight-knit, though as the three musicians noted, not as large as it used to be. During the hey-day of fiddle contests, Cathey explains "there'd be someone out there in the crowd who could play better than the winner." Williams jovially responds that because so many fiddlers had come down to Broadway Brewery, "there's even better ones out there right now." Cathey owns a German fiddle from the late 1800's, passed down from his grandmother. Yet



Apprentice Gretchen Seifert (front) and master weaver Irene Livingston demonstrate twining techniques on floor looms at Columbia Art League. Rather than the usual denim strips, Seifert is experimenting with soft rope in her warp.



Livingston sets up small frame looms with denim warp so visitors could try twining a row or two. Folklorist Darcy Holtgrave (left) enjoyed twining so much, she documented the process with her iPhone and made a small, simple rug later.

the trio insists the fiddle itself is not terribly important, and one purchased for ten dollars at a garage sale will do just as well – the important thing is to have a good bow. The air in the Brewery was palpable with toe-tapping and enthusiasm for the musicians, their instruments, and their tunes.

The Missouri Folk Arts Program is pleased to sponsor such talented and vibrant artists who are active members of the art scene in mid-Missouri and throughout the state. With their contributions, artistic traditions remain alive and strong, especially through engagement in local communities. When local artists engage with their community and their community engages with them, a special sort of magic occurs.



Master fiddler John P. Williams (left) and Kenny Applebee (right) play old-time tunes, while apprentice Robert Cathey (center), the author, and several Broadway Brewery patrons enjoy.



While Williams takes a break, apprentice Robert Cathey (left) and Kenny Applebee (right) play a series of tunes Cathey learned during the apprenticeship. Musicians' family members drove in from Madison, Ashland, and Mexico, Mo. for the performance.



Photos by Deborah A. Bailey