Leslie Klipsch
The Yarn Shoppe carries an impressive variety of beautiful fibers. Much of their inventory is local and fair trade.

2014 SPRING BREAK

Adventures in knitting

BY LESLIE KLIPSCH

It was a cold Thursday night when nine of us — four moms and five children — gathered around the large wooden table in the middle of The Yarn Shoppe to begin our knitting lesson. We buzzed excitedly, catching up with one another while admiring the yarn we had chosen and unwrapping the small, colorful needles from their packages. Our instructors Valerie Newkirk, who owns The Yarn Shoppe, and Bambi Suits, the shop's clerk, circled the room explaining to our eager crowd what we were about to learn.

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We began with a simple stitch and set out to make bookmarks. Before long, needles started stirring and our pleasure grew as we slowly began to master the first knot, and then the first stitch. Our patient instructors leaned in to guide our fingers, cheerfully encouraging fine motor finesse.

"Your needle is naked!" The delightful Ms. Suits called out playfully, making the kids (ages 8-12) giggle. "Put some yarn on it to cover it up!"

Ms. Suits and Ms. Newkirk, as well Elaine Phelps, a frequent patron who helped with the class, could not have been kinder or more patient as we — all novice knitters with ages that spanned decades — slowly learned. They created a warm atmosphere and fostered great excitement. The walls of the shop are lined with gorgeous textiles and the color and cheer of the space pervades, producing a space primed for creativity, artistic motion and community.

"Everyone was talking and laughing," my 9-year-old son Oliver observed over ice cream after class. "It was so warm and cozy … it was fun!" The other children — and moms — agreed.

"I have been wanting to learn how to knit forever and I'm happy for the opportunity to do so with my daughters," said Jennifer Vondracek of LeClaire who brought her two girls, Celia, 8, and Bella, 9, to the class. In fact, the Vondracek family headed out on a road trip the next day and the girls declared that they would definitely be bringing their new needles along for the car ride.

Perhaps you'll follow Celia and Bella's

Leslie Klipsch
Bambi Suits (far right) and Valerie Newkirk (second to left, farside of table) offer classes to individuals and groups interested in learning how to knit.

lead. Whether you find yourself relaxing at home or sitting poolside someplace warm this spring break, knitting needles can travel. As we discovered at The Yarn Shoppe, it's both a centuries-old craft as well as a new family adventure that can be learned — and enjoyed — together.

Our favorite part of the knitting class

Perhaps you've noticed the rise of the Rainbow Loom among the local elementary-school set here in the Q-Cs. For months, kids have been elbow-deep in the tiny, colorful woven bracelets and my sons are no exception. Because of this recent creative interest, I was correct to assume my eldest might enjoy similar handiwork by learning how to knit. Not only did I enjoy the time I got to spend watching him learn a new skill and interact with his friends, but the evening was also a great way to spend special time together.

Since our class, Oliver remains excited about his new skill and has completed a superhero eye patch and begun working on scarf. We continue to share what we remember from our evening at The Yarn Shoppe and happily check each other's work at home.

Ms. Newkirk's and Ms. Suits' favorite part of their work

Both women agree that working in a place where people come to express themselves is gratifying and that learning how to knit is a great way to engage a creative outlet. "You can express yourself in your projects," Ms. Suits said.

"What I like best about teaching is

encouraging the students to believe in themselves and to trust their hands," added Ms. Newkirk, who took over ownership of the shop in 2011 and moved it to its current Davenport location in 2012. "When the student — at any age — is finally getting the hang of it, you can see the look of accomplishment and satisfaction on their face."

Why you should visit The Yarn Shoppe

Ms. Newkirk says knitting is a social, community activity. For virtually any group hoping to spend time together or enjoy a new experience, a class at The Yarn Shoppe is a delightful venture. Classes are free; you're simply asked to buy your supplies at the shop. (This ranges from approximately $10-$15 per person.) The Yarn Shoppe carries beautiful chemical-free, hand-spun, local and fair trade fibers, the production of which ultimately empowers women and families near and far. The quality of the shop's cotton, linen, silk, blended — even cashmere — yarn is carefully curated and soft to touch.

The details

The Yarn Shoppe is in the Olde Town Mall in Davenport (903 E. Kimberly Road) and can be reached at 563-359-1002. Every Thursday night, the shop hosts a "sit and stitch" where people gather around the large table in the middle of the shop to knit, crochet, and enjoy one another's company. Classes can be arranged for any kind of group and ability level by calling or contacting the shop. (Think birthday parties, book clubs, parent-child outings, Scout events, etc.) Already scheduled March classes include sock knitting, mitten knitting, and arm knitting. Visit theyarnshoppe.net or Facebook for more details.

Each month in The Gold Standard, Leslie Klipsch, a freelance writer and editor based in Davenport, shines a spotlight on the gems of the Quad-Cities area — for Gold Book readers. She enjoys reading, cooking, spending time with her husband and three young children and exploring all that the Quad-Cities has to offer.

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Leslie Klipsch
Bambi Suits teaches Oliver Klipsch, 9, the basics of knitting.