

# Boomers take up hobbies, explore new interests

Saturday, June 8, 2002

By **AMY BALDWIN**, Associated Press

At the end of the work day, what Rosemary Forrest wants most is to sink her hands into cool, soothing clay and create her next masterpiece.

"I get tired of looking at the computer screen. When I come home, it is wonderful to make a pot, carry it outside and load my kiln. Or, to have a dog at my feet while I am throwing a pot. ... It is so satisfying," said Forrest, 51, of Augusta, Ga.

Forrest is like many baby boomers, who after years of focusing on their careers and raising their families finally have free time to spend on hobbies. Some are trying out new pastimes, while others, like Forrest, are returning to activities they used to enjoy before work and

home life took over.

"A lot of people are finding that they have more money, or the kids are older, and so they can do what they have always wanted to do," said Betsy Carter, editor in chief of My Generation, AARP's magazine for baby boomers.

"Having fun and really enjoying free time and doing what you want is what our guys are all about right now."

Carter, 56, speaks from experience, having recently taken time write a book of her memoirs, which is being published in August.



**Rosemary Forrest throws a pot on her pottery wheel in her Augusta, Ga., home. She first fell in love with pottery as an undergraduate at what she calls her "hippie college" and has returned to the hobby in recent years. AP photo**

Meanwhile, her husband has taken over their basement to create a vast model train system.

The hobby business has taken notice. Last year, the industry grew to \$25.7 billion, an 11 percent increase over \$23 billion in 2000, according to the Hobby Industry Association in Elmwood Park, N.J. Boomers, 76 million strong and fairly affluent, have fed that growth.

The association also found that 58 percent of American households take part in hobbies, up from 54 percent the year before. Stock analysts who cover such companies as Jo-Ann Stores Inc. and Michael's Stores have attributed the growth to boomers and to a greater interest in home-oriented activities following the Sept. 11 terror attacks.

Not surprising, boomers have pursued their hobbies with much of the same enthusiasm and discipline as they did their careers and families. They take classes, purchase all the essential equipment, and even schedule time into their days to give undivided attention to their leisurely pursuits.

In Forrest's case, she's spent \$1,000 for a kiln to fire her pottery, and \$500 for the wheel on which she crafts it. Next year, she hopes to have a studio built in her backyard.

Boomers have gone to lengths to make their hobbies a priority much like a business lunch or a parent-teacher conference. In a recent survey by My Generation, 60 percent of boomers said it's important to them to be active and learn new things.

Maggie Holben, 49, of Littleton, Colo., programs into her Palm Pilot the time needed to take care of her houseplants and outdoor landscaping.

"It is part of keeping me feeling great and balanced," said the public relations executive of tending to her ivies and philodendron. "If you don't schedule time, it is really easy not to do it."

Holben's friend, Kathy Jacobs, also of Littleton, Colo., has attached a similar sense of urgency to her hobby, painting with watercolors. The 54-year-old massage therapist takes weekly painting classes, because as she says, she wants to know everything about the craft — immediately.

---

" A lot of people are finding that

they have more money, or the kids are older, and so they can do what they have always wanted to do.

Having fun and really enjoying free time and doing what you want is what our guys are all about right now."

— Betsy Carter, Editor of AARP magazine, My Generation

---



"I wish I could know it all right now. Time is running out," said Jacobs, who started working with watercolors a year ago.

In New York, catering to boomers' growing desire for new activities and hobbies spawned an entire boomer-oriented offshoot of the 92nd Street YM-YWHA.

In a brownstone called the Steinhardt Building, the boomer facility, which opened in January, offers a wide range of lectures and classes. There are noon talks, for boomers on lunch, that explore cerebral topics like foreign policy and longer series on cooking. Activities range in cost from about \$12 to \$200.

"For those who have raised children, a lot of their life has been about other people," said Wendy Sabin Lasker, a boomer and director of the program, called Daytime@the Steinhardt Building. "We are looking at the years ahead, and we are headed for longer lives. So, we are looking for the next best thing for us to do."

That's exactly how Forrest feels. She didn't mind giving up pottery years ago to care for her two daughters, but now it's her turn to do what she wants.

"Now, my kids are mostly through college and I have this nice house and a little extra money. ... I decided, 'If you are ever going to do it, this is the time,' " Forrest said. "I am having a blast with it. Every time I pull out the clay, I think, 'Oh, I love this.'"