



Bethlehem resident Hazel Hayes has created a meeting place for fellow knitting enthusiasts at her Lenoir shop, 'Chix with Stix.'

## Close Knit: The Fibers and Friends of Hazel Hayes

**T**here's not a lot more comforting than a hand knitted scarf, sweater or shawl. A tiny hug is always waiting for you in each and every knit one and purl two. Hazel Hayes took up the hobby to pass the time, but then it turned into a bustling business. That business then turned into a community, and I have to say it, sorry, a close-knit community at that. Now she and her many fiber friends are sharing their comforting craft with the greater community by coddling those who need it most with their cuddly creations.

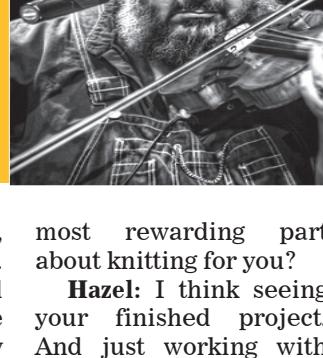
**Layne:** Where are you from originally?

**Hazel:** From Lenoir. But I lived in Alexander County near my parents, Dover and Connie Andrews. They're both deceased now. They had a farm, and my husband and I built a log house in behind them in 1983. But now I live in Bethlehem in Oliver's Landing. My husband passed away 12 years ago, and eventually taking care of everything got to be too much. So, I decided to downsize.

**Layne:** So, tell me about your knitting. How did that get started?

**Hazel:** I started knitting before I ever got married. I actually made two sweaters. I still have them. They're in great condition. There was a lady here, Mrs. Anderson, that had a little shop in her basement here in Lenoir. That's where I got started. One of the ladies that I used to work with years ago, used to kind of monitor what I was doing and help me when I ran into trouble. But I've always liked crafts of any sort. I've done cross-

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stitch, candle wicking, I've done basket making. But knitting, I came back to that later.

When I first started, it was a hobby, and then you get married and you have children and life happens. So, I just dropped it. I didn't knit anymore actually until my husband passed away in 2006. When that happened, and my children were grown, married and gone, I was going stir crazy. So, I drove up to the knitting

shop in Blowing Rock, and the bug bit me again. And then when I started looking for yarn, there wasn't anything really close, so I started my shop, 'Chix with Stix' here in Lenoir. I rented a little space in 2007. Started out very small and have just gradually built up. Then we moved to this larger space in 2009. We have taken out a few walls and just gradually added to our space.

**Layne:** What's the

most rewarding part about knitting for you?

**Hazel:** I think seeing your finished project. And just working with the fibers. It's therapy. It became my therapy when my husband passed away. I can pass the time. It relaxes me. Now I make most of the models for the store.

**Layne:** What's the most challenging part for you?

**Hazel:** Well, with the business, it's keeping up with inventory. And knowing what to buy. The sales reps will come in and they have all these beautiful fibers, all these beautiful colors!

And you've got to say, 'No! Back away!' (Laughter).

It's like a kid in a candy shop. But it's very difficult to gauge what people will or will not like.

**Layne:** What all do you have here? Do you have loose wool for spinning?

**Hazel:** Knitting and crochet supplies. We haven't started carrying the roving (unspun loose wool) yet, but we do have some people who spin their own yarn who come here. And we've done needle felting. And the lady that teaches that brings in her own fibers. With needle felting, you start with roving wool and a metal or Styrofoam frame. And you actually punch those fibers together with a needle. They felt themselves

bright, vibrant color. And it's probably got five or six different stitch patterns in it. I think the ladies are going to like that when I bring it in.

**Layne:** Do you have any other projects that you are planning on starting in the future?

**Hazel:** We're getting ready to start a beginning knitting class for one thing. But we do offer a lot of classes here, beginning and some advanced. We've done polymer clay here too.

People can use it to make their own buttons to match the garments they have knitted.

**Layne:** I know my wife certainly got a lot out of learning to knit—spinning too.

**Hazel:** We do have some spinners, and at one time they thought about starting a group, but they haven't gotten around to doing that yet.

**Layne:** And what about weaving?

**Hazel:** I don't have a loom. And I thought about investing in one, but they're very expensive. I took a class up at Black Mountain and I did finish my scarf. But it's not something that I really enjoy doing.

**Layne:** Is there any type of thing in particular that you like to knit?

**Hazel:** I'm a shawl person, shawls and scarfs. As you can see by most of my creations that are around the shop here.

**Layne:** Does it ever get frustrating at all?

**Hazel:** Oh, sure it does. When you're trying to do a stitch pattern. Sometimes the simplest scarf will be the one that I have the most trouble with. I've got one that's blocking (flattening out under a weight) right now. It's fuchsia, really

bright, vibrant color. And it's probably got five or six different stitch patterns in it. I think the ladies are going to like that when I bring it in.

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One of the many colorful creations made by one of the 'Chix with Stix.'



A colorful collection of yarn awaits the perfect project.



A wooly woodsman made by a process known as 'needle felting.'