

## 20th Anniversary History Fun Facts

*The documentary film focused more on what SWFAC was doing in recent years and 2025. This provides more history from the beginning. Many apologies if anyone has been left out. So many people made and continue to make SWFAC a true Collective. Thank you to everyone who has been a member/volunteer!!*

The idea for SWFAC started in 2004 when Harolene Pitts brought an article about the NM Women's Foundation offering grants for cottage industries to the Mogollon Rim Fiber Arts Guild meeting. The guild did not offer sales events and she wondered if they would be interested. The guild decided not to pursue the grant but Mattie Eagle and Charmaine Wait liked the idea and started working on what that could be done as a complimentary activity to the guild.

By chance, Charmaine met Mary Pierce of the Las Cruces guild in a yarn store in Las Cruces. Mary liked the idea too and offered to set up a meeting at the NM Farm and Ranch Museum during the NM Women's Foundation's Rag Rug Festival. 50 fiber artisans attended and let us know what they would like to see. Primarily a means to earn income and classes taught by people in the area.

That meeting impressed the NM Women's Foundation and resulted in SWFAC receiving a \$2,000 grant. Mimbres Region Arts Council acted as our fiscal agent and we were off! The work to establish a non-profit began and more meetings to see what fiber artisans needed. We received another grant to open a brick and mortar gallery in addition to attending Rag Rug Festivals in Santa Fe and Las Cruces. Member Saguara Compton contributed to the rent each month to make this happen.

The first location of The Common Thread was on Market Street across from the Elks building.

So, so many people donated time, energy and talent to the Collective in the beginning and continue to do so!

After The Common Thread on Market was started, we quickly outgrew the space and moved to 107 W. Broadway, the space that All My Momma's Junk currently occupies. Vicki Gadberry helped pick out the paint colors for the walls, and Jean Hill and Charmaine Wait along with Jean's husband Gerry Engle (voluntold) painted the entire space.

Renee Despres had a sign painter friend who graciously made and painted The Common Thread

sign seen in the window in the picture. Renee also drafted our first McCune grant proposal.

We needed a website, but with no funds, Charmaine Wait wove and donated yardage for Catrina Helbock in exchange for our first website. Catrina made a beautiful skirt with the fabric.

Our logo was designed by Cathy Claxton, a professional artist and weaver. The logo is original work and represents patterns found in many types of fiber art. She designed tiles for gifts at an early volunteer appreciation and a few members are lucky to have them! Cathy was a huge supporter of the Collective and we were sad when she moved to Arizona. You can see her work at [Ridgway Graphics](#).

### **The Common Thread**

The Common Thread Gallery was well received by our community and provided more than 60 fiber artisans a means to sell their fiber art. Member volunteers ran the shop and we soon learned all of the protocols for selling and volunteer management.

What made The Common Thread so interesting was the variety of work for sale. Some members only had a few items for sale, and other had more items. There was a learning curve on how to display all the different types of fiber art. Jill Heppenheimer, co-owner of the Santa Fe Weaving Gallery, came down and gave a much-appreciated critique of the gallery and how to improve displaying the fiber art. We implemented everything we could and indeed, sales improved!

Jill and co-owner Barbara Lanning also graciously taught a marketing class for members here in Silver City titled *An Artlife: What's Business Got to Do With It?*

We sold and shipped items to England and around the country! We also became the southern site for the New Mexico Fiber Arts Trails, an economic development project of then Governor Bill Richardson and NM Arts. Charmaine Wait was the southern coordinator on this project. We were and are grateful to NM Arts for the grant funding for the gallery and our outreach programs.

The gallery continued to do well and a paid staff member was needed to coordinate the business. Charmaine Wait was the first part-time executive director, followed by Donna Flenniken and then Rebecca LaFleur. It would not have been able to run without the many dedicated board members and members who donated their time and skills to run the gallery.

The gallery closed at the end of 2015 mostly due to a shortage of volunteers. At the same time

the gallery was operating, the fashion show started, Lynn Welsch chaired and initiated the Fiber Art Festival, Jean Hill was rocking several classes a month, and we had outreach programs and fiber art camps.

As SWFAC grew, more activities were added. These included outreach programs with Life Quest, a half-day week long fiber art camp for youth, the fashion show and the Silver City Fiber Arts Festival that was offered in alternating years with the fashion show.

The Silver City Fiber Arts Festivals were held at the Grant County Conference Center on Fridays and Saturdays in November 2011, November 2013, and July 2015. The festivals were chaired by Lynn Welsch and would not have happened without with the help of numerous SWFAC and community volunteers as well as other community organizations.

Sponsorships from community members and organizations helped fund this major fundraiser. Raffle baskets also were part of the festivals fundraising efforts. No admission fees were charged and only donations were collected at the door. Widespread publicity in a large variety of outlets by Charmaine Wait and her volunteers helped bring in about 1500 visitors to each festival.

Each festival consisted of about 40 vendors of various fiber art supplies and handmade fiber art from 8 states! Multiple fiber arts classes were also held along with demonstrations. A big part of the festivals consisted of exhibits of a large variety of fiber arts made by our members and other fiber artists who brought in special exhibits from around the state.

Exhibits consisted of weaving, traditional, contemporary, and art quilting, embroidery and other specialty hand stitching, knitting and crochet, sewing, dying, silk painting, hooked rugs, antique quilts, handmade dolls, baskets, felting, and more.

Because the Fiber Arts Festival was so much work, it was done in alternating years with the fashion show. The fashion show started in 2008 and stopped in 2012. The last two shows were chaired by member Mary Leen who did a wonderful job of producing the show. The first fashion show was held at the Silco before it was renovated, two were held at the Bayard Community Center and one was held at the Besse Forward Global Resource Center on the campus of WNMU.

SWFAC also offered a half-day week long fiber arts camp. The first was at Penny Park and then at the Fiber Arts Center that SWFAC had on Yankee Street where Wild West Weaving is currently. Member Saguara Compton also helped with the rent on that space as well.

Several community groups including the Golden Threads and Silver Needle embroidery guild helped, and many volunteers offered their talents to teach youth rigid heddle weaving, embroidery, sewing and more.

Outreach included a knitting program heading by Eileen Cwik who taught clients of Life Quest, an organization that supported developmentally disabled individuals. The clients then were able to sell their work with no commission at The Common Thread right before the holidays. The clients were thrilled and we made a special news release and it brought people to shop specifically to support them.

Numerous classes were held at The Common Thread and other locations and organized by Jean Hill. Often, 3 classes were offered per month, first to members, and if not filled to the community. Sharing fiber art skills among members was an important issue with the members polled at the founding of SWFAC.

Thanks to Jean Hill for putting together this 20 year timeline of SWFAC. We will share the timeline over the remainder of the year.

### **2005/2006 The Beginning**

The Southwest Women's Fiber Arts Collective (SWFAC) was incorporated in October 2005 as a 501 (c) (3), with members from all around the southwest area of New Mexico. The New Mexico Women's Foundation gave SWFAC a grant to make a directory to connect fiber artists in the area. In January of 2006 the 1st Directory of Members was published, with contact information, and the types of fiber arts they did.

SWFAC had a booth at the Annual Las Colcheras Quilt Show in Las Cruces in February, 2006, again some members traveling to sell work of other fiber artists as well as their own.

SWFAC opened The Common Thread gallery (TCT) on Market Street in May 2006, but moved to a bigger venue on Broadway in September. Members were the volunteer workers for the most part, with a reduction in commissions on items they sold.

### **2007/2008**

SWFAC has more than 60 members selling fiber art through our gallery.

The 1st Annual Tapestry of Talent (TOT) fashion show held at the Silco, with models wearing garments made by members, most for sale. With an onsite "First Peek Boutique" selling NEW fiber art not yet seen at TCT after the show.

SWFAC did a week long fiber camp in summer for kids, and sponsored classes for members and the public, with a special knitting class for Life Quest clients.

The Second Directory of members was published in 2008, with lots of new members!

SWFAC's 2nd Annual Tapestry of Talent held at the Bayard Community Center.

**2009-2012** 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Tapestry of Talent held at Bayard Community Center, 4<sup>th</sup> at WNMU. The first Fiber Arts Festival (FAF) was held as a 2-day event at the Grant County Conference Center. In 2011 it included 12 Workshops of various lengths, 19 special exhibits, 8 demonstrations, and 38 vendors from NM, AZ, CO, NV, and Kentucky.

**2013-2015** The second and third Fiber Art Festivals were held in 2013 and 2015, both 2 day events at GCCC. The Tapestry of Talent continued through 2014. The Common Thread gallery on Broadway was closed at the end of 2015, mostly due to shortage of volunteers to keep the doors open.

**2016-2018** SWFAC is re-inventing itself with input from members. In order to support members who wanted to sell we had a show/sale in August at the Market Place Cafe's community room, and our Holiday Fiber Art show/sale in November was at the Women's Club. The Board voted to sponsor the printing of a book called "Local Color, Dye Plants of the Gila New Mexico Region", written by members Donna Foley and Prairie Small. We had our second "Holiday Fiber Arts Show" at the Women's Club in November on the Friday and Saturday after Thanksgiving with about 311 customers coming through. We joined the Silver City Art Association as a gallery member so we can take advantage of their publicity & participate in their events. SWFAC had the third "Holiday Fiber Arts Show", moving to the larger Grant County Conference Center after Thanksgiving again. We did 2 "pop-up gallery" sales, September & October at Soul River gallery.

**2019** We had 3 "pop-up galleries"; a Spring Walkabout sponsored by SCAA in May, one in August during Taste of Downtown, and the last during Weekend at the Galleries sponsored by SCAA every October. We had 39 members. Our next annual Holiday Fiber Arts Sale took place at GCCC right after Thanksgiving.

**2020-2021** Covid struck, SWFAC discontinued in person meetings for a while. We did eventually meet outside in small groups in parks, masked and spaced for show and tell and socializing. Our next annual Holiday Fiber Arts Sale was done differently in 2020. It was held on four weekends in October at a building downtown. Different artists were selling

each weekend. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, masks were required by everyone and social distancing was practiced.

SWFAC put on an exhibit in **May 2021** for about 2 weeks, called *Focus on Fiber—Pursuing Creativity in the Pandemic*. The fiber art pieces were shown in the windows of a building downtown. There were a few live demonstrations done by members on weekends. By 2021 our annual Fiber Arts Sale was back at the GCCC right after Thanksgiving

**2022** SWFAC had 42 members this year, the number slowly increasing as new fiber artists found us. Our Annual Fiber Arts sale was moved to the Murray Hotel Ballroom, and date changed to be during the “Weekend at the Galleries” sponsored by SCAA, Oct. 8 and 9th. SWFAC began planning to start Tapestry of Talent shows again in 2023, which is a major fundraiser for us.

**2023** We now had 59 members. SWFAC has sponsored at least 3 classes a year for members. We continued Mental Health & Fiber Days monthly on 3rd Thursdays, which started in 2019. SWFAC has participated in Give Grandly the last couple of years, as an outreach and fundraising activity. The Tapestry of Talent was restarted as a yearly event again, in April. It was simplified from prior years shows, and held at the Silco Theater. We were nearly sold out! We again had our annual holiday sale at the Murray Hotel Ballroom.

**2024** Our two main events, TOT in April and the Fall Fiber Art Sale in October continued with success. We now had 66 members doing all kinds of fiber arts. We added a quarterly Stash Swap to our Mental Health and Fiber Days, allowing members to downsize their creative items, and perhaps find other people's give-aways that they can use. A new outreach program was started in September. “Mending Our Ways” is designed to help reduce clothing waste by teaching community members how to mend and offering free mending of clothes. This will continue every other month in collaboration with the Future Forge Makerspace.

**2025** Displays at the Silver City Public Library were held in March and September to show member's art and notify people of upcoming TOT and the Fall Fiber Art Sales. An exhibit at Light, Art Space showcasing members work over the past 20 years in November to mark our 20th anniversary. A 20th anniversary documentary film showing SWFAC members, events, etc. was shown in October at the Silver City Film Festival.

Sources of funding over the years include:

Grants and support from Domanica Foundation, McCune Foundation, New Mexico Arts, New Mexico Women's Foundation, Silver City Lodger's Tax, Elks Club, Janey and Suzi, and the Town of Silver City.