

Locals take up hobbies during COVID-19



By Mike Riley

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With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, two lockdowns and many health and safety restrictions, some people have had more time at home and away from the office than usual over the past year. With this extra time, many have taken up a new hobby or perhaps picked a hobby back up that they used to enjoy. Several people around Bancroft and the surrounding area who have done so, filled us in on their hobby adventures during COVID-19.

Natalie Phillips lives in Gilmour and is the library events coordinator at the North Hastings Public Library. She says the only thing she started doing new during COVID-19 was jewelry making, in Oct. 2020.

"I wanted to learn in order to sell what I make. I have sold a few things, but have a long way to go to get where I want with jewelry making. I'm starting simple with beaded bracelets, earrings and keychains," she says.

Phillips says that she learned by trial and error, and just bought the materials she needed and jumped right in. She also consulted YouTube and has looked up some ideas that she eventually wants to try.

"I guess for me, I am loving the fact that I can do so much with jewelry making. It's something with which you can be really creative. There are so many things that I want to try, which over time will not only give variety to what I am making, but it will increase the quality of the jewelry, which is the ultimate goal," she says.

Tracy McGibbon is the manager at the Wattle and Daub Café and is also a councillor with the town of Bancroft. She started up a hobby she had when she was younger; baking cakes. She estimates she's baked over 400 signature cakes since COVID-19 started. "It all started with mud cakes on my grandma's porch. I used to layer them and put real flowers on them. My grandma told me I'd make wonderful real cakes someday. First cakes I ever baked at the café were using her old cake pans. Now I use some of her recipes," she says.

Bongo Bongo is a businessman and entrepreneur who owns and runs Camp Bongopix in Whitney. He has gotten into livestreaming video games on Twitch during the pandemic.

?My business event and hospitality business, Camp Bongopix, began livestreaming one year ago with the emergence of the pandemic. We first focused on livestreaming live music at our Facebook page and found it to be very enjoyable. My partner and I are both musical and social, and in spite of the necessary health guidelines, we wanted to find a way to safely continue to express ourselves musically. The format of the livestream allows us to take song requests in real time and to interact with the audience. One year later, we continue to perform on Facebook live as it allows us to express ourselves musically and to stay connected with our fanbase,? he says.

Bongo says the next stage of his livestreaming hobby took shape in Jan. 2021 when he expanded his livestreaming activities to video games on the social media platform Twitch. He says not only has he been able to connect and interact with other gamers but he's been able to begin growing an online community of like-minded people.

?Streaming video games is technically demanding and there are several software programs you have to become comfortable with. I have spent hours watching YouTube tutorials explaining how to use them. Livestreaming video games on Twitch feels like running your own TV show. When I'm streaming video games, I'm basically a talk show host, a gamer and the producer of the show. The internet is truly empowering. You can now broadcast your own TV channel on Twitch. It's an exciting time,? he says.

Dannielle Switzer has a farm just outside Bancroft with her family, and she says she's picked up bird watching again since COVID-19 began.

?I've always loved birds. When I was little, I spent a great deal of time at my grandma's house. One of our morning routines was to don our housecoats, grab our hot drinks; her black coffee and my hot chocolate, then head out and sit on the deck. I fondly remember the smell of spring. Grandpa was always steady feeding the birds and he used to leave seed along the rail of the deck as well as hang a piece of fat on an old wire for them,? she says.

Switzer recalled that her grandparents had so many bird books, and that she loved watching the chickadees hop around, calling them such a cheery little bird. When COVID-19 hit last March, she thought bird watching would be a great thing that she could do with her son Kurtis.

?My sister bought us a pair of binoculars while my mother-in-law and her friend Avis each gave me my two bird books,? she says. ?Kurtis is not quite three but knows when he sees a new bird at the feeder to grab the binoculars and the books so we can identify it!?