

Living the gourd life

Sullivan brings her 'girls' to Great Fair

Story by Nichole Chivers

Visions of gourds keep Margaret Sullivan awake at night.

When her husband takes her fishing, he sits in the boat relaxing while she hunts down rocks for her gourd art bases.

She has transformed her Southwest home into a gourd art gallery.

In 1998, Margaret and Fred Sullivan moved to Rio Verde with plans to retire and visit with their three daughters and grandchildren.

She wanted to travel and he wanted to golf.

However, her life of leisure was disrupted when Margaret stumbled upon a gourd centerpiece at a cocktail party.

Fascinated, she borrowed

books about gourds and traveled to a gourd farm in southwest Phoenix.

Her daughter bought Margaret her first bag of gourds for Mother's Day.

What it is

A gourd grows in a field like a pumpkin but takes a year to harvest.

At least 35 varieties of gourds exist.

"What you can do to wood, you can do to a gourd," she says.

Margaret specializes in creating diverse kachina dolls, masks and gourd bowls.

Boxes of bare gourds reach the ceiling of Margaret's garage barely leaving enough

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Margaret Sullivan recently won a first-place award for her gourd Kachina at left.

What: Margaret Sullivan, Great Fair gourd artist
Where: Avenue of the Fountains, Fountain Hills
When: Feb. 22-24, Friday & Saturday 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.
 Sunday 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Cost: Free
See a map of the Great Fair on page 6.

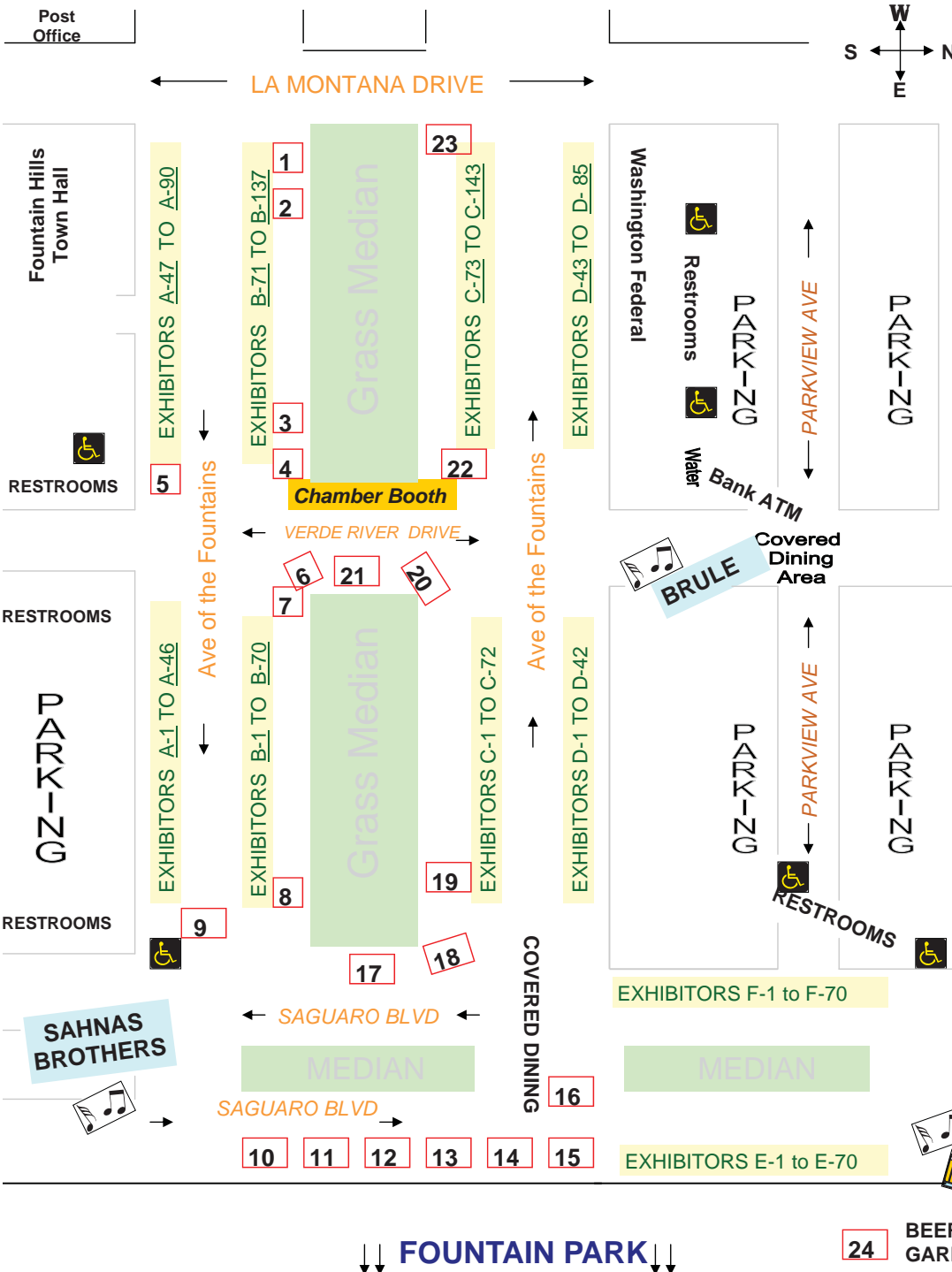
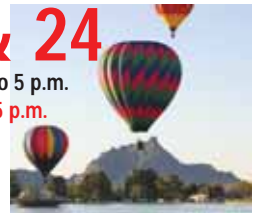


FOUNTAIN HILLS GREAT FAIR

Feb. 22, 23 & 24

Friday & Saturday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Sunday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Presented by: Fountain Hills Chamber of Commerce



Map courtesy of the Fountain Hills Chamber of Commerce

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room for their cars.

Margaret makes an annual trip to a gourd farm in Casa Grande and picks out the gourds she will use for the year.

The first step to creating gourd art is cleaning it.

"The inside is difficult to clean. I have to use a drill with a steel brush," she says.

"I have more tools than my husband now."

In her studio, Margaret works on at least 30 smaller gourds at a time, six to 12 for the larger gourds.

"People love the smaller ones for Arizona souvenirs," she says.

Margaret also makes gourd Christmas ornaments that customers return to buy each year, to add to their collection.

Margaret says she doesn't have time to produce all the ideas she has for gourd pieces.

"I go to bed thinking about what I can do the next day and when I wake up I am excited to do everything," she says.

Great Gourd

To make her dolls, Margaret leather-dyes, uses oil sticks on the gourds, creates distinctive facial features, inlays glass and creates an elegant headdress from exotic feathers from all over the world.

"The eyes are not the same because our bodies are not the same, if you look in the mirror the two sides of your body are different. It's human nature," she says.

Margaret recently returned from the Wuertz Annual Festival in Casa Grande where one of her kachina dolls placed first, another second.

"My kachina dolls are my version of Southwest art, not imitations of the Native American ritualistic dolls and they are not intended to be," she says.

Margaret's heart is in every gourd piece she makes. She refers to her kachina dolls as her girls and makes sure they are decorated with the best pieces.

She says, "I may have to visit my pieces, if I wasn't done loving it yet."

Smaller kachina dolls with necklaces decorate the fireplace mantle.

"I spent a lot of time in Goodwill taking apart earrings, making necklaces out of the pieces I find," Margaret says.

"I am now making necklaces for the larger dolls and the customer can actually wear them," she says.

The base of each doll is a rock or a piece of petrified wood.

Fred, her husband, enjoys fishing and golfing while Margaret finds beautiful

rock bases to add to her art pieces.

"I go out fishing while she goes out rock hunting, I bring home the fish and she brings home all these rocks," Fred says.

The gourd masks have creative features like rattlesnake skin.

They're decorated with horsehair from a bow company, jewelry pieces and she also carves out terrains with a drill.

"The masks appeal more to the men," Margaret says.

In addition to making dolls and masks, Margaret also makes gourd bowls.

The Fair

Margaret will take at least 40 pieces to the Great Fair in Fountain Hills.

Margaret does around four big art shows a year, easing the hassle of Fred's job to set up.

"I do it because I love people, Margaret says. "I love talking to people."

"If I had a dollar for every time someone just looked around, smiled and told me how much they admired my stuff, I would be rich," she says.

Last year Margaret sold all her pieces, leaving her home gallery completely bare.

"But I didn't buy stuff to fill the space because I knew I would make more pieces," she says.

And that's something she goes to bed thinking about.

Take a Gourd Class

Margaret and Jane Boggs teach beginning through advanced classes. They begin April 10.

Beginning Gourd Class:

Covers basics of selecting the right gourd, cleaning, sanding and design layout. Learn how to draw on designs and add interest by wood burning, coloring with leather dyes and paint. (All supplies included.)

Cost: \$79

Contact: Margaret Sullivan at (480) 471-0017 or msull3519@aol.com



(Above) A mask by Margaret Sullivan includes rattlesnake skin and feathers from Australia.

(At left) Some of Sullivan's gourd Kachina dolls await their headdresses.