



WEAVING *a bit of* PEACE *in the* COMMUNITY

By *Kiel Majewski* **Photos** *Pixie James*

You may know her through her days at Wabash River Books, or you may have seen her downtown in BookNation. Perhaps you've seen her pieces at the Gopalan Gallery of Contemporary Art, or worked with her at ArtReach. Or maybe you've even met her through the monthly poetry readings she leads at the Coffee Grounds with fellow poet Sarah Long.

In so many ways, Zann Carter has been promoting the arts in Terre Haute since she moved here from Florida some 20 years ago. Now, she's working on a project to literally stitch the community together through weaving. >>>

In July of 2010, Carter was awarded an Individual Artist Program grant from the Indiana Arts Commission. She has utilized her \$2,000 grant to purchase a Saori weaving loom.

"I'm a fiber artist," said Carter, who also works in knitting and freeform crochet. "I had just come across a different style of weaving, a very free weaving called Saori. It's a Zen kind of weaving to me. I said to myself, 'I'll ask and see if I can get this loom to further my artistic journey.'"

Rather than a more traditional type of grant to a non-profit agency, the IAP is unique because grants are awarded specifically to individuals to further their artistic work.

Of the 53 grantees, six were from Vigo County. Besides Carter, local grantees included Myke Flaherty, Fran Lattanzio, Sala Wong, Peter Williams, and Mary Kramer. Carter credited Arts Illiana for its important role in the process.

"I'm really grateful for Arts Illiana — not only did they encourage me to apply for it, but they held a workshop on how to apply which was helpful because I'd never written a grant proposal before," Carter said.

As part of the grant, Carter is required to make some aspect of her work public through an exhibition or by putting on a workshop, for example. She chose to weave the community right into her project by taking the Saori loom to public spaces to create a banner woven by community members.

"My personal artistic journey involves community and engaging young people in the arts, especially so they can see how healing it can be. It just seemed like this is more than just this little thing I have to do for the public part of my grant. It really is also part of my personal art career and journey," she said.

Traditionally, Saori weavers create long "peace banners" to be displayed in public places. Initially Carter promised to create one such banner, but the public aspect has taken on a life of its own.

"What I've been surprised about it is how it really seems to engage everybody that has started weaving," she said. Carter initially took the loom to the Crossroads ArtsFest in Septem-

ber, where children got involved in the weaving.

"A lot of parents told me that they've never seen their kids engaged like that, even for that brief time," she said. Carter has found resonance with the weaving project among diverse audiences at the ArtsFest, Vigo County ArtReach, local knitting shop Riverwoods, and at an intergenerational Halloween party at the First Unitarian Universalist Church. The public project has evolved into three "Earthpeace banners," which will be presented to the White Violet Center for Eco-Justice at Saint Mary of the Woods College's annual Earth Day event in April.

Saori weaving is a process started in 1968 by Misao Jo, a Japanese woman who started weaving in her late 50s and continues today. The Saori form is attractive to weaving neophytes partly because of its simplified loom. The equipment features foot treadles allowing for simple operation of the harnesses, even by people with disabilities. But first-time weavers also appreciate the philosophy of Saori.

"In this particular form of weaving, there are no mistakes," Carter said. "You're expressing your own self through the colors you choose, the textures you choose, and the way you weave — and it's all okay."

Saori weaving has four basic principles. **Consider the differences between machines and people.**

"If you want something perfect, a machine will make it," Carter said. "But if it's people-made, why does it have to look perfect like it's machine-made? So it really is an adjuration to say, 'Don't worry about it being perfect.'" For Carter, Saori weaving as a process is just as important as the product.

"It's a rhythmical back and forth, which is the meditative, calming aspect of weaving that people really love," Carter said.

Let's adventure beyond our imagination.

"That's about experimenting and saying, 'I'm going to try these colors together, I'm going to try this texture,'" Carter said. But she also has plans to integrate the weaving into storytelling and poetry, and to use Saori to stitch together her other forms of fiber arts.

Let's look out through eyes that shine.

"I sort of thought this was about happiness and joy," Carter said, "but I also thought you can be looking out through tears, eyes that shine

with tears, and you can still work and be creating through a sorrow. Part of what I do is to encourage people to use the arts for healing, especially through loss and grief; and as self-care."

In March of 2006, Carter suffered a profound loss when her youngest son Patrick passed away at 20 years old.

"I see that as a crucial changing point for me, because then everything that I did artistically was something I needed to do to get me through. A day at a time, the arts were what helped me to survive that horrible loss. I wanted to share with people that saving grace of the arts."

Since 2007, Carter has been sharing that saving grace at the Maple Center for Integrative Health, a local not-for-profit agency. She and friend Cathie Laska, an art teacher at Fuqua Elementary School, have been leading an annual workshop on coping with grief and loss through the arts.

"I'd like to expand it farther," Carter said. "It's not just about the loss of a loved one — it's all types of grief. As human beings, we know loss. It's about how we handle it and move through the changes. And I think the arts are a very positive, constructive way to accept those changes and move through them, rather than self-destructing." Carter also noted the importance of the arts in self-care, such as managing chronic illness.

Let's learn from everyone in the group.

The Saori philosophy acknowledges that every perspective is valuable to the life of the community — something that Carter knows through her work with children.

"Children just amaze me with their insights," she said. "If you really listen to children, you learn a whole lot. And they're fun — the way they see the world. So I feel like I may be bringing something to them, but I'm getting something too."

Carter has a website dedicated to the project, where one can find photos of weaving events as well as information about the next weaving venue. Visit: www.zanncarter.com/earthpeace.html.



