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Hip Stitchery

Knitting is a fad that just won't unravel.

[Kay Daly](#) ▶▶ March 20, 2004

They sit in coffee bars, in book shops, and at bus stops. Heads bent down, fingers busy, working away to the rhythmic click of their needles. They are the knitters and they are everywhere.

A few years back, a new craze for knitting was heralded in the press. Celebs like Lara Flynn Boyle, Sandra Bullock and Laurence Fishburne made the hobby the height of chic. "It's not just for grannies anymore," we were told. "Knitting is the new yoga."

So what's happened to the hottest trend? Did it fizzle, or is the yen for yarn still the greatest thing since sliced bread?

All the signs say that knitting is here to stay. "We keep asking when this will end," says Brenda Janish, founder and organizer of the Chicago chapter of Stitch 'n' Bitch, a local knitting group. "But it just keeps going."

Janish, who started her knitting group in October of 2000, would be in a position to know. Her weekly group is regularly attended by about 20 knitters, some hard-core members, others occasional drop-ins. Her mailing list, which distributes announcements about the group, has more than 900 members. She also receives five to 10 requests each week to start new branches of Stitch 'n' Bitch in other cities. "The 'granny stigma' is definitely gone," she says.

And those practicing the craft are not just fly-by-night fad followers. According to Bethany Lankin, a member of The Windy City Knitting Guild, a lot of those now taking up the needle are actually returning to the hobby after a hiatus. Lankin herself learned to knit in kindergarten, left it off until high school, and then took it back up again as an adult.

Others come new to the craft, drawn initially by its hipness factor, looking for a way to pass the time that brings its own rewards. But whether newbie or old hand, knitters agree that this time-honored tradition has a lot to offer.

For database manager Jenn Derby, knitting is the perfect blend of right brain and left brain activity. "You've got the creativity, but it's all within a pretty tight structure," she says. "So it's great for a computer person. The knits and purls are like the 1s and 0s of programming."

The boom in knittery has been a boon to entrenched knitters. Besides giving the cachet of "cool" to a long-maligned craft, this wave of popularity had expanded the knitting community and generated a bounty of resources for knitters.

"There have never been so many magazines for knitters before," Larkin says. She also notes the wide variety of new yarns that have hit the market. "It used to be you could choose wool, or acrylic, or wool-acrylic," she says with a laugh. "But now you have sparkly yarns, fuzzy yarns, yarns with feathers woven in. It's amazing."

For those who just want to get out of the house and meet other knitters, Janish's Stitch 'n' Bitch is a low-key way to knit some new bonds. Members can drop whenever they want. The group tends to draw mostly women in their 20s and 30s who enjoy knitting as a casual, after-work pastime.

The Windy City Knitting Guild offers a more formal organization, with monthly meetings, classes, knitting-related trips, and a regular newsletter. "Our goal is to encourage, promote, and support anyone who is interested in knitting," says Larkin. In addition to the monthly meeting, the Guild hosts weekend workshops with guest demonstrators and works with local charities to provide knitted items to hospitals and homeless shelters. Members are all ages, and range from beginners to experienced crafters.

Hi-tech stitchers can also get their dose of community online from a number of knitting-related blogs. A local fave is Chicknits.com, the online journal of Bonne Marie Burns. On her site, offers chatter about knitting, displays a gallery of her work, an online boutique, and a collection of tips and articles about the craft of knitting.

But whether a knitter works with a group or all alone, in a coffeehouse or on a front porch, there's a basic joy in the creative act that they all share. As Larkin says, "I'm still amazed that you can start with a bunch of strings and end up with something new."

Close-Knit Groups

Chicknits KIP

What: A group of "modern knitters" indulging in "KIP" (knit-speak for "knitting in public")

Where: Letizia's, 2144 W. Division

When: Every other Thursday, 7-9 p.m. (check the site for a notice about upcoming meetings)

How much: Free

Kelly Girls

What: A knitting group of students and young professionals

Where: Cosmicafe, 1944 W. Montrose

When: Every Wednesday, 7:15 p.m.

How much: Free

Stitch 'n' Bitch

What: A casual, weekly get-together where knitters can chat and tat

Where: Art Gallery Kafe, 1907 N. Milwaukee

When: Every Tuesday, 7-9 p.m.

How much: Free

Windy City Knitting Guild

What: Regular educational and social programs, plus an informational newsletter

Where: Sulzer Regional Library, 4455 N. Lincoln

When: The third Tuesday of every month, 6:45-8:45 p.m.

How much: \$20 annual dues

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