

Senior Crafters - An Untapped Market

by Trina Williams

Let's face it. We aren't all going to be another Donna Kato, Lisa Pavelka or Marie Segal, with students lining up to take our classes. But, if you love to teach crafts, including clay..... have I got a job for you!

A couple of years ago, I got a call from the independent craft store where I teach polymer clay classes. The economy was headed south and my classes were not filling. Would I like to teach a craft class at a Senior living facility? A guaranteed gig, twice a month for \$40 for each hour long class. It turns out I was already teaching water aerobics there for the Arthritis Foundation. It is close to home and now I am into my second year of coming up with something new to craft every month!



It turns out I have learned more from these students than they have learned from me. It is a given that when your participants are seventy or older there will be deficits in both hearing and vision. Think bright colors, good lighting and lots of visual cues. I had better have a sample of the project to pass around during class or I am in trouble!

The room we use has poor lighting so the first thing I did was line up some extra OTT lights. (I also get reimbursed for supplies and try to keep it under \$20 per class but it is getting harder since I now have about a dozen regular participants.) I find I am using up a lot of supplies I have had for years so it works out for me too. Since the word has gotten out I now get lots of donated supplies. One of the ladies brought me a brand new large Craft Tote



Sometimes we craft things to eat!

This facility has two levels of care from independent to assisted living. Most of the crafters are fairly independent. The facility provides many outings and has a dining room to rival a good restaurant. Crafts, painting, and knitting and needlework keep everyone busy.



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with all of the little containers in it plus a ton of crystal beads. We made some very classy bracelets from them. I should mention here that the classes are mostly women. Every once in a while a man ventures in but either leaves in the middle or surveys the scene and bows out.

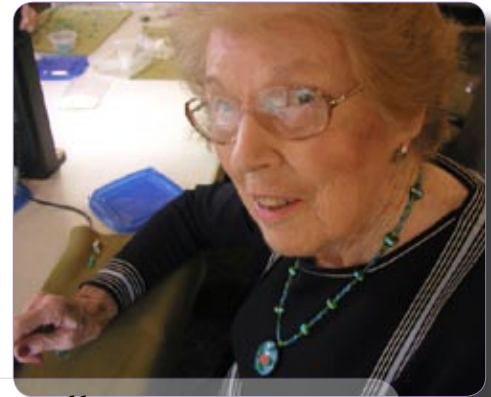


Lois decorates a flower pot



Alice is making clay motifs for her flower pot.

I tend to have more clay projects and they love the clay. They love to make jewelry. Now they are starting to bring me things to repair which is fine with me. I don't charge them unless I have to buy extra beads or findings.



Jo shows off her necklace. We made beaded necklaces with a clay pendant from my stash.

This past week was frustrating... There's a fine line between fun and too challenging. We were making button necklaces and some don't have the dexterity for wire wrapping buttons. I gave them the option for stringing on cord but it didn't "look like jewelry". After 2 sessions some are still not finished with the project. I will pick something much easier for next time.



Marguerite and her beads.



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Barbara wears two projects, a necklace and a bracelet.



Dot rolls her Paro clay.



Glitter clay with pre-made hearts and flowers using Trish's heart project, with a twist.

Making some elements ahead of time works well and helps us keep to our schedule. The class is scheduled for an hour and I usually come 1/2 hour ahead. So now, so do the students, LOL, and we usually run over. I am fortunate that our classroom is 10 minutes from my house. In February we did the heart pendants from Trish's Poly Clay Play Club and instead of crystals I used little clay hearts and flowers, baked ahead of time, that they could just push into the pendant. It worked well and we were able to finish in one class.



Here's the gang showing off their heart pendants.

There will always be those that sail ahead and finish a project and those that struggle and need help. If you keep a cheery attitude even the glitches and disasters are taken in stride. Even the complainers always say they enjoyed the class at the end. I, also in the aged 70 group, have been known to forget things. I am setting up a duplicate supply box so I don't have to keep repacking tools.



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I'd like to share a few rules of thumb:

1. Start with easy things, like book marks, to assess the skill level of your participants.
2. Have them make suggestions of what they would like to do.
3. Have samples of the finished project ready for them to see up close.
4. Be ready to help. Sometimes you will do most of the work.
5. Always make positive comments.

After a year, I know pretty well who will need help and who will forge ahead. Only two people have dropped out and one came back!



Nancy shows off her heart.



Thelma is proud of her first project.



Marcelle loves green!

Marcelle, who also takes my pool class, wears the earrings she made every day. They are watercolor pillow beads and I think the chlorine has faded the color but she made them and she loves them!



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We had lots of Pardo Clay to work with. They loved the red with glitter!

The rewards of teaching this population are many; enthusiastic students, a chance to try out new ideas, making a difference in the lives of seniors, a chance to laugh about your mistakes and nobody ever says they didn't get their money's worth!

