

Find a guild.

Failing that, start one!

Mollie Tracy says it rather elegantly:
“Knitting is a way to connect with each other, connect with the past and pass on those connections with our loved ones.”

To that end, with her mother, Mollie is creating a yarn shop in Charleston, SC, that is as much like a home as a retail store. There'll be a living room complete with comfy seating and a kitchen with snacks. “The more the customers interact with each other and with us, the more excited people get about knitting.”

The support and friendship to be found in that kind of environment may not be found in every city, but you can get to the same place if you join a knitting guild.

How do you find a guild? You can start with **KnitNet's Guild Registry** <http://www.knitnet.com/guild.htm>, which currently lists more than 100 guilds in the United States and Canada. **The Knitting Guild Association (TKGA)** has a “Find a Guild” <http://www.e-offinger.net/tkgg/guildsbystate1.cfm> service for knitters in the United States but it only lists guilds that are part of The Knitting Guild Association. **Wool Works**, <http://www.woolworks.org/guilds.html> the granddaddy of knitting Web sites, also has a guild listing for Canada and the United States but it carries a warning: it may not be up-to-date. **About.com Guide to Knitting** <http://knitting.about.com/library/weekly/aa010700.htm> also provides information and links to knitting guilds around the world. The famous, original **KnitList** has a Guild List, updated last January. <http://knitlist.com/guild.htm>

If your Web search fails, try using discussion groups like the above-mentioned famous **KnitList** <http://www.knitlist.com/>. Sign up, check out the daily postings and ask your 7,000 fellow listers if they know of a guild in your area.

If you can't find a guild in your area using the Internet, you'll have to resort to actually talking to people!

Check with your local yarn store staff, your town's Parks and Recreation Department and, if you don't live in a metropolitan area, your local newspaper's “lifestyles” editor.

Still no guild?

You're just going to have to start one.

Here's how Ruth Cook started the Southern Illinois Fiber Arts Collective (SIFAC) nearly five years ago:

“My fiber experience began at age five with stamped embroidery. A friend introduced me to knitting as an early teenager. I alternated between the two crafts for many years. As an adult, I realized that there must be others with fiber passions in Southern Illinois. The problem was in finding them.

“Then the Internet changed my life. I discovered email lists, product Web sites, etc. I joined several email groups and began my search for fiberholics in my area. Slowly I began finding people not only in my area, but in my town. Then I found Elaine. Elaine and I eventually became the cofounders of SIFAC. Elaine and I worked diligently, talking to anyone who would listen, and inviting people to join us.”

Lissa D. Hurwitz tells a similarly interesting story about The Northern Virginia KnitKnutz.

“The Northern Virginia KnitKnutz, a totally fun, totally unstructured, totally free gathering of knitters of all skill levels and adult ages, came to be out of desperation.

I had recently moved to the metro-DC area and knew no one. I love to knit with other people and joined an “official” guild that met once a month. However, I felt I already had enough requirements in my life and didn't want to do – or waste my time hearing about – book group discussions, group projects, etc. Besides, once a month was definitely not enough for me!

I posted an inquiry on the then-new Knitter's Review forums, asking if anyone in the area would be interested in getting together every other Sunday to knit and chat. I got three responses and KnitKnutz was born almost four years ago.

One really special aspect of the group is everyone's willingness – eagerness, really – to jump in and help others. I've taught dozens of people to knit (“Pick up a ball of yarn and needles at and come to the next meeting!”) and have to laugh when newer knitters express concern that they won't be welcome. I let them know that the only problem they'll face is choosing between the dozen or so people who will come running to help!

Starting KnitKnutz was the best thing that I have ever done for myself – the wonderful friends I've made through the group and the amount I've learned from these folks has changed my life.”

Build a Guild How-to

Way back when knitting was new, guilds were professional associations of artisans who knitted for a living. Mostly, those artisans were men. What is believed to be the first knitting guild (<http://umt.edu.pk/textile/issue7/t3.htm>) began in 1527 in Paris.

While most guilds today are dominated by women, there's a movement amongst some men who knit to start guilds just for men. The movement is being led by **MenKnit.Net**, a soon-to-be-launched online knitting magazine for men. <http://www.menknit.net/startgroup.html>

MenKnit may be unique but one way or another, guilds get started because somebody has a good idea.

According to Linda Stoltz, the Prince William Purlers Knitting Guild resulted from a suggestion by a local yarn shop owner. Two of her students kept registering for knitting classes just for the fellowship of knitting together. The Guild was founded in Manassas, Virginia January, 1997 with six people. "We currently have approximately 40 members. Our organization's focus is twofold; education and charity," Linda says.

Marcy Schroeder says her guild – Fibers Unlimited Guild of Fond du lac, Wisconsin, was started in 1998 by psychiatric hospital nurses and aides. "We all worked different hours and days and could never settle on a meeting time. Finally we rotated Friday evenings and went to dinner and then went back to a conference room at work and worked with fiber."

The Greater St. Louis Knitters Guild will be celebrating its 20th anniversary at a "Founders Day Luncheon" this December. As a result of the growing popularity of knitting, according to Robin Connolly-Medici, guild membership has increased to more than 300 knitters.

"In the spring we bring in a nationally recognized designer for a Weekend Workshop and our Fall workshop comprises classes taught by experienced guild members. We contribute our talents to several charity organizations producing chemo caps and preemie caps for local hospitals, pet squares for the Humane Society, various items to Ranken-Jordan, a pediatric rehabilitation center. With the very hot summers in St. Louis, we decided to devote two of our meeting programs to creating a lightweight alternative to the normal heavy chemo caps. As a result, more than 150 baseball caps, children's bucket hats, lightweight cotton caps have been embellished and decorated with knitted do-dads, buttons, bows and knick-knacks for fun and light summer wearing by cancer patients!"

Cheryl Miller reports that the Riverside, CA, knitting guild is celebrating its 10th anniversary.

"We were started by a bouncy lady, Martha Kish, who loves knitting and getting together. We have about 40 members now. We have all sorts of Charity knitting programs, we knit premie hats for an area hospital, Project Linus blankets and Precious Pals for the Corona Police Dept. This year we are doing knitting contests for Precious Pals and a Two-Ball Challenge to challenge ourselves and have some fun. Knitters are wonderful people and we have a bunch of them knitting here in Riverside, CA!"

But how do you attract people who want to be part of a guild?

You advertise, of course.

Begin with printing a flyer. Download our ready-made flyer at <http://www.knitnet.com/guildflyer.pdf> that you can use to start a knitting guild in your community.

Knit with us!

If you'd like to share
the joys and challenges
of knitting with new friends,
you're invited to help
create a new knitting guild.

We're meeting for the first time on



day and date

time

locations

Please join us or contact

name, telephone and email address

Free to prospective members... Refreshments...

If you don't know how to knit yet but want to learn, you're welcome, too!

Fill in the blanks

Then, post it

1. in yarn stores
2. coffee shops
3. municipal recreation centres, community theatres and libraries (ask permission!)
4. on the community bulletin board of your local supermarkets, office supply and discount department stores.
5. craft supply outlets
6. at your local night school
7. at your office

Tip: be sure that the meeting date is at least a month from the date that you post the flyer: people have busy schedules and need advance notice, no matter how keen they might be to join a guild.

Most community newspapers and radio stations have free “bulletin board” listings for community-based, non-profit events. You will have to provide information at least two weeks – sometimes more – in advance. It’s best to provide information in a very simple format.

The first meeting of the new Community Knitters’ Club will take place Thursday, December 1, 2005 beginning at 7 p.m. in the Anytown Municipal Recreation Centre, 123 Anytown Drive. All knitters – and those who want to learn to knit – are welcome. There is no cost to attend the meeting which will include refreshments. For more information, contact Mary Smith at 111.555.1234 or marysmith@example.net.

While you’re waiting for that to percolate, you can use the services of **Meetup** <http://www.meetup.com/> to connect with people in your community who already want to “meet up” about knitting. You will have to register to get information about meeting locations.

What should we do? Where will we meet?

The first meeting of Toronto’s Downtown Knit Collective (DKC), created by a handful of knitters, took place in a hot, crowded church basement in January, 1997. The guest speaker was Sally Melville. About 60 people attended, leaving the organizers stunned at the turnout.

Now, nine years later, the DKC holds meetings at the Metro Central Y in the auditorium. Speakers in 2005/2006 include Sally Melville, who graciously makes an annual anniversary appearance and Lily Chin who will speak in April. More than 200 people attend each meeting.

The phenomenal success of the DKC is a testament not only to those who have stepped forward to organize and administer the group but to the creativity of its members. The December meeting, for example, is The Work of Our Hands Fashion Show. In February, the meeting will comprise Mini-Workshops on Essential Knitting Skills: a dozen skills presented in hands-on 15-minute workshops. In the past, Deb Gemmell of Cabin Fever talked about “knitting from the top down” and Stephanie Pearl-McPhee, a DKC member and renowned knitting author, also known as The Yarn Harlot, brought the house down with laughter.

The DKC also publishes a monthly newsletter and holds an annual marketplace along with winter and summer workshops.

Great guilds with great programs don’t happen by accident. Most guilds have an executive that includes, at a minimum, a president, a program chair, a communications chair, a treasurer and, of course, a Webmaster. Programs are usually planned at least a year in advance.

The DKC is a great model for a new guild, so if you're wondering where to meet and what to do when you start your own guild, check out the DKC's Web site

(<http://www.downtownknitcollective.ca/index.html>)

Another role model for guilds is the 300-member Minnesota Knitters' Guild, created in 1985. **The Minnesota Knitters' Guild** Web site <http://www.knitters.org/> includes a knitting tip-of-the-day, articles and free patterns.

The Minnesota Guild is lucky enough to meet in the Textile Center of Minnesota. Other guilds meet in libraries, schools, recreation centres and church halls.

What else do guilds do? Most manage to arrange a 10 per cent – or better! – discount at yarn shops for their members. They undertake charity knitting. They provide instruction to

beginners by having an expert ready to solve problems or teach techniques before each meeting. They organize field trips.

A place to meet and activities are usually financed through an annual membership fee, often as little as \$25/year.

Some guilds – like the DKC – have a published code of conduct. Others are more casual, relying on good common sense to ensure that everyone is treated with respect.

Of all of the activities, however, the best thing about a knitting guild is that it offers the opportunity to bring your knitting, sit down with friends and share a couple of happy hours. Whether you have your sights set on a large organization with an ambitious program or a small group of friends who get together for coffee and a natter with knitting, it's worthwhile building your own knitting guild.