



EGA national tapestry

by Kay Haley

The National Tapestry, *America the Beautiful*, has been under development for the past five years. Vice President Operations Carol Dam, the first tapestry chairman, wrote in early 2004: “Every long journey begins with the first step, and ours has begun with a first stitch, one of many, many stitches to follow as we explore America the Beautiful.”

All five panels were exhibited in October 2006 at the national seminar in Richmond, Virginia. It was the first time all five sections of the tapestry have been displayed together.

Judy Jeroy proposed the concept of a tapestry representing our country to the EGA president, and it was approved at the July 2003 board session. Her vision was a tapestry composed of five panels drafted on 18-count canvas. Judy’s kitchen door became her easel as she painted a wash of latex paints, blended from one color to another using a foam brush. Applications of color indicated mountains, hills, grasses, and autumn leaves.

Each panel contains wording from the song *America the Beautiful*, and the typography was designed by Canby Robertson of Annapolis. For the tapestry, Coats & Clark donated the thread, Kreinik the metallics, and Zweigart the canvas. No technique was excluded, and any embroidery method was welcomed. Creativity was anticipated, encouraged, and is celebrated in this monumental and glorious undertaking.

Panel two (detail) represents the area from the Great Lakes Region to the Tennessee Valley Region to the Gulf Coast of the U.S.

Connecting the Parts

Suggestions were made during the development process to help with continuity and consistency for all five panels, but most was left up to the stitchers and the coordinators. To unify the panels, beads donated by Pat Reynolds have been used for the rivers, and the color and stitching for the sky have similar characteristics.

The trees on the tapestry were planned to be a consistent element. Thus, they needed to be stitched individually so they could be placed strategically in areas to balance the design. Ultimately, all the trees were stitched by one person, with a similar stitch and style in free motion machine embroidery on water-soluble web. Free-standing, with no raw edges, the trees could be attached easily wherever they looked best.

Casey Bradford, whose expertise is machine embroidery, on water-soluble web, became our “tree lady.” Each panel coordinator chose five or six species of trees indigenous to her region and sent photographs to Casey. As many as five or six of each species are represented.

The stitched trees were based on photographs and Casey’s research. “You have to realize that these won’t look exactly like the photographs,” she warned. “That’s not the way I do things. But they should be recognizable!” Casey used a product similar to Fabri-Solvy™, which is more durable than regular Solvy™ but dissolves easily in cold water. A very light bare-bones sketch was done freehand on the Fabri-Solvy™ with a permanent fine-tip pen. Then Casey stitched—many layers and many shades of brown, green, or whatever was needed first to build up the tree trunk and then the foliage. She knew the finished tree would shrink down from its stitched size, so she took that into account, wanting the finished product to

be about 3-1/2 to 4 inches tall. She used cotton and polyester sewing threads, probably at least fifty shades of green among them.

Problems? Mostly how do you to make an elm look different from a maple or an oak or orange tree. They’re all just big, bushy trees! Color helped with getting detail into a 4-inch tree. The different species of evergreens and palms were a challenge. Spanish moss kept her guessing for a while, as did the Saguaro cactus. But once she got each species designed, the trees worked up relatively quickly—less than an hour per tree. Her favorites? That Saguaro cactus, the Monterey cypress, and the palo verde tree. “I’d never heard of the palo verde before, but my little ones look just like the photographs!” The biggest lesson she learned was that the type of water-soluble web she used is an incredibly flexible medium, doesn’t tear much, and can withstand very thin lines as well as very dense stitching.

The American Eagle perched on the initial at the beginning of the article is from panel four.

Casey Bradford created all the trees for the five panels. A quaking aspen tree was stitched in bright yellow fall foliage (below). This tree is on panel four.





Panel one is the East Coast of the U.S. This detail illustrates the northeast and mid-Atlantic areas of this panel.

Panel Two: First to be Completed

Druscilla Defalque, coordinator for panel two wrote in June 2005, "At first, some members felt intimidated to stitch but found ways to contribute. They could not have been more intimidated than I felt when the 2x4-foot painted canvas and large box of threads arrived. How would we complete this project?" Complete it she did and in record time. It was determined that over 2,500 hours of stitching went into this first-completed panel. Druscilla documented every step. Her notebooks are a wonderful resource, full of pictures and instructions. The Birmingham Needlearts Chapter undertook all the background landscape. A dogwood in stumpwork, silk-embroidered Cahaba lilies, and machine-made azaleas are just a few of the many flowers stitched in this panel. A cardinal, alligator, and Kentucky race horse also have a home on this panel. As each slip was attached, the background was thoughtfully developed to support the birds, animals, and flowers.

Finishing

In early 2006, panel two was delivered to Nancy Lukoskie, owner of Fancywork Finishing in Maryland, who will finish all five panels as they are completed. Since 1984 Nancy has been finishing needlepoint for the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. We are very fortunate to have such an authority in finishing to assist us in mounting our tapestry.

After much discussion and research, we initially planned to frame each panel in a Lucite® frame. After considering the nature of the piece as a whole and naming it the EGA National Tapestry, we decided that it should be treated as a tapestry and not be encased in Lucite®. Each panel will be blocked and backed with a coordinating fabric and a Velcro® strip across the top. A lattice strip with the other half of the Velcro® is supplied with each panel. This strip is hung on the displayer's wall, and then the tapestry is adhered to that strip with the Velcro. This is a very discrete method of hanging the tapestry, which will be an advantage when exhibiting all five panels.

Panel One

Dale Sokolow, panel one coordinator, reports that this panel will be the next in line to be completed. It is currently at the home of Pat Reynolds, who is finishing the tent-stitch border. Each panel has a tent-stitch border to cover the edges for finishing. Pat is also attaching the remaining trees and extending some of the floral meadows. "I would say less than twenty hours is left to complete it," she says.

Panel Four

Carolyn Webb, panel four coordinator, is working on attaching a few more slips. In 2006, panel four traveled around the Rocky Mountain Region and has just a few more stops before it is finished. Bette Sargent from Colorado undertook the tremendous task of personally taking the tapestry to many of the chapters in the region. Betty writes, "I have taken it over 1,000 miles, to seven chapters in Wyoming and Colorado." She goes on to relate that there are many miles between chapters in the Rocky Mountain Region, with several chapters being very small. Many are unable to attend seminars and participate in

region and national activities, so their involvement in this national tapestry project was a treat for them. Panel four was exhibited at the region seminar in Glorieta, New Mexico, and then it traveled to Idaho. Western Idaho members had the opportunity to gather around the panel's very large frame mounted on saw horses and to contribute many hours of stitching.

The mountains on this panel beautifully depict the words "for purple mountains' majesty." Marnie Ritter helped create and stitch the magnificent mountains which play a dominant part in this panel's design. Stitchers also recreated the colorful red rocks of New Mexico and the erupting of Old Faithful.

From the mountains to the deserts, this area of the U.S. has an immense variety of plants and animals. Mountain goats, bighorn sheep, and elk are represented in this panel.

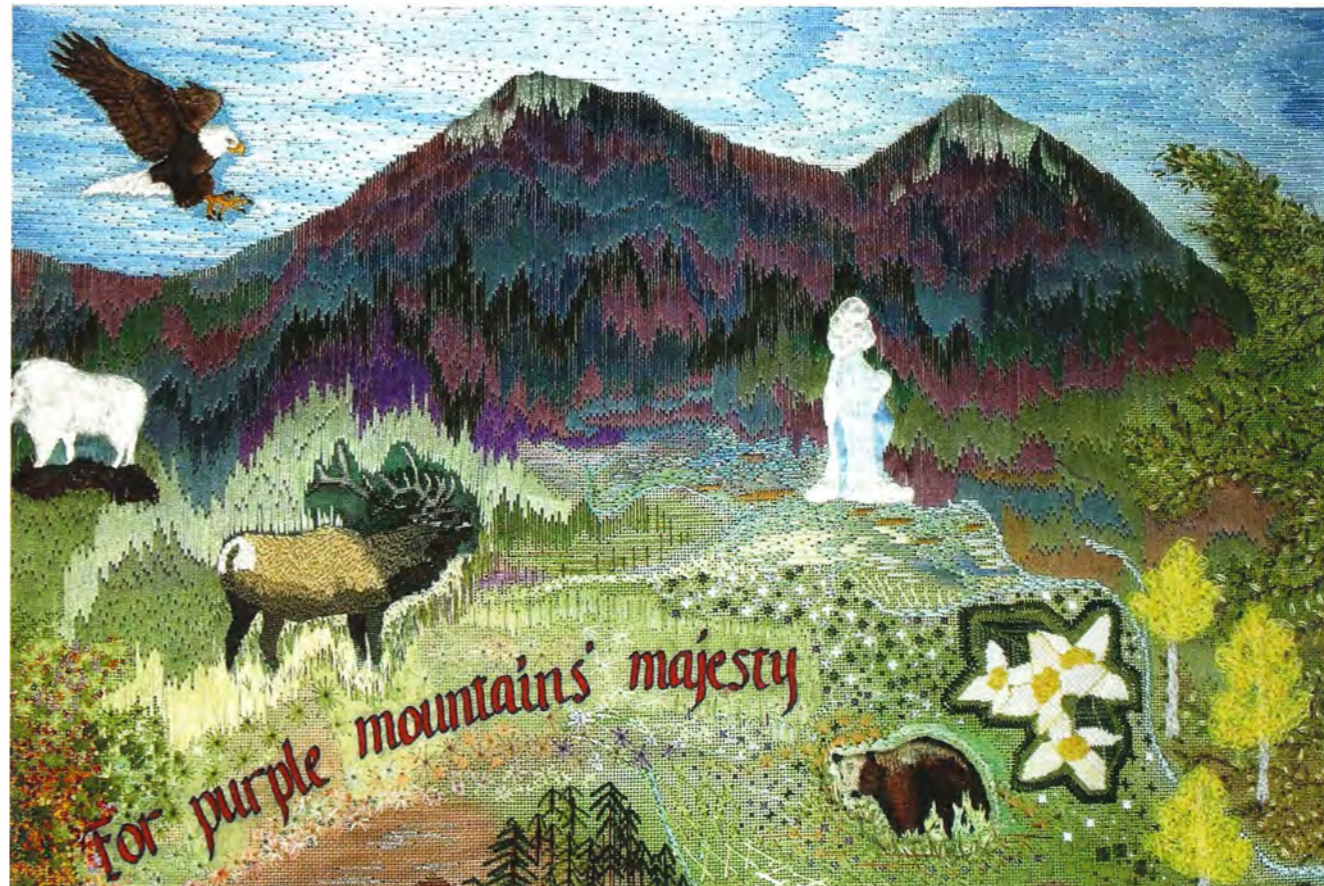
Panel Three

Panel three represents the center of the U.S. from the U.S.-Canada border to the Gulf of Mexico and a portion of the Rio Grande. Sandra Gordon, panel coordinator, reports

that members of at least nineteen chapters and members-at-large have been involved in the development of panel three. The embroiderers include designers and teachers, but for many of the stitchers, it was their first experience in stitching an original piece without a commercial pattern. The various slips on this panel (twenty-eight so far) have great stories of creative design. The Texas longhorn was modeled after a member's longhorn named Milkbone. Another Texas stitcher used her photographs of blooming bluebonnets as the basis for her flower designs. A Coulee Country Chapter (Wisconsin) member relied on trilliums growing in her locality for her stitched flowers. Sand dollars were made by a Quinsippi (Illinois) member using a photocopy of the subject. Recycled leather from an old purse was used to make the crawfish.

Sandra points out that some motifs were worked on by members of different chapters. For example, a member of one chapter may have stitched the slip, a member of a different chapter attached the slip, and someone from a third chapter probably embellished the slip and its surrounding area to make an appropriate environment for the animal or flower.

Panel four (detail) covers mostly the Rocky Mountain region. The western border runs from Montana to Arizona. The mountains of the top contrast with the desert areas at the bottom of the panel.





Panel three (detail) represents the central part of the the U.S., stretching from the northern Canadian border to the Gulf of Mexico.



Panel Five

Panel five, recently featured in the December 2006 issue of *Needle Arts*, depicts scenes of Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington. This panel as well as all the others, has developed from a plethora of designs and landmarks.



One of the wonderful developments of this tapestry is the diversity and differences in each panel. Oceans on each side of the U.S. are unique and representative of the variety of plants and animals found in each area. An eagle on each panel became an unexpected object of continuity. When the panels were placed together, it was apparent that the eagle took flight on the West Coast panel soaring across the sky, coming to the Eastern Seaboard's panel wording (and so appropriate) "from sea to shining sea." The movement of the eagle across the panels is just one of many surprising developments of the project.

This EGA project has traveled by car, plane, U.S. Postal Service, FedEx, and UPS to region meetings, national seminars, and to just about every state of the country. What a phenomenal endeavor: thousands of hours by stitching and thousands of miles traveled for *America the Beautiful*, an adventure in stitches.

The goal for completion of each panel has been established, and the entire tapestry is scheduled to be completed by October 2007 and ready for finishing. The grand debut will be for the fiftieth anniversary of EGA at the 2008 national seminar in Louisville, August 31 to September 5.



National Tapestry Chairman Kay Haley has served as director for Rocky Mountain Region, past nominating committee chairman, and Challenge consultant. She is also an EGA certified needlework judge and resides in Boise, Idaho. She can be contacted at khaley48@ctcweb.net.

Panel five includes Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington. A wide variety of animals, including sheep, are found in this panel.