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# South Sound artisans talk about what they do, why they do it here



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Lampmaker Pat Tassoni in his Olympia apartment, which he decorates with the Space Needle lamps he makes. **Rosemary Ponnekanti** - Staff

BY ROSEMARY PONNEKANTI

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You couldn't find a bigger difference than where Laurie Cinotto and Kelly Rigg do their work: a pin-neat crafting room in floral pastels versus a gritty warehouse where sparks fly and forges growl. But the Tacoma paper crafter and Olympia blacksmith share one thing in common — a love of making things, and an agreement that the South Sound is a great place to do it.

Thanks to social media, online stores and a cultural turn toward the unique, the maker movement is big these days. With a recent recognition from Etsy as a Maker City, Tacoma joins Olympia as towns where makers thrive. And with holiday craft fairs such as Tacoma Is For Lovers (Nov. 19) and Olympia's Duck the Malls (Dec. 6), all can benefit from their creativity.

“Buying handmade celebrates human individuality and uniqueness,” says Diane Kurzyna, known as Ruby Reuseable, an artist who has organized Duck the Malls since it began 14 years ago. “It supports your community, and is the antithesis of faceless, mass-produced mundaneness.”

Here are some South Sound residents who talk about what it takes to be a maker.

## **PAPER CRAFTER**

### **LAURIE CINOTTO**

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**What she does:** Makes paper flowers, paper

corsages, folded paper garlands of lanterns and stars, glass holiday balls with tiny paper trees and animals

**Bio:** Tacoma. 48. Husband, two cats and lots of foster kittens.

**She also:** Sells kitten photo merchandise, runs a kitten blog, does professional floral centerpieces, writes DIY books

**Find her stuff:** Local craft fairs.

**Information:** [lalalaurie.com](http://lalalaurie.com).

Laurie Cinotto's crafting room looks exactly like a magazine photo. Neat shelves of pretty paper patterns, organized tubs of scissors, a vintage desk, a shelf of paper flowers in pinks and blues, even a floral carpet and cushion. Partly it's the kittens she fosters — they force her to be neat. But Cinotto is also one of those people who have incredibly neat fingers. Watching her swiftly and perfectly fold paper circles to create a spherical lantern about one inch wide, you understand how she not only makes delicate holiday ornaments for Tacoma craft fairs but gets corporate commissions for table arrangements that include entire tiny paper villages and swathes of paper bouquets.

### ***How did you get started?***

I was a fine artist first, painting oils, but for practical reasons I abandoned that. You have to have a separate space. So I started making things, and I also had other jobs, like a florist. Crafting was easier to fit in.

### ***What are the challenges?***

This time of year it's physically demanding — you sit and make things for hours, your hands get tired. And I'm always juggling (jobs), something always comes second. But some things are so easy I could do them with my eyes closed. Almost.

### ***What makes Tacoma a maker city?***

It's inexpensive — you can afford a live-work space which is such a luxury in other places. Artists here support each other and the city does too. There are a lot of things happening. And everyone knows each other, which is a good thing.

### ***Why do you love what you do?***

I love the flexibility of my life. I never ever set an alarm clock. I can be in here working in my PJs with kittens at my feet. It's pretty dreamy. I feel pretty fortunate I can do that.

## **BLACKSMITH**

### **KELLY RIGG**

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**What he does:** Hand-forges metal art and sculpture, plus functional items such as gates, rails and garden hardware

**Bio:** Olympia. 47. Wife (“She’s the breadwinner, I couldn’t do it without her”) and two sons.

**Find his stuff:** Duck the Malls and Lincoln craft fairs, plus commissions.

### **Information:**

[bighammertechnology.weebly.com](http://bighammertechnology.weebly.com).

In an industrial park in outer Olympia, a nondescript warehouse hides a scene that might have come out of a fairy tale. A blacksmith, taking a red-hot metal bar out of a glowing forge and pounding it on a cone-tipped anvil before brushing off the flakes and putting it back into the flames. Only this forge is gas-powered, and there's an electric power hammer that chomps metal like candy. But for Kelly Rigg, this is an art with long tradition. Creating leaves, curls and stems out of hard steel, Rigg not only works his craft, he teaches others — part of the blacksmith's code.

### ***How did you get started?***

I had always been in construction, but when I inherited a coal-burning forge 18 years ago from my grandfather I taught myself how to use it in our Seattle backyard. This was pre-Internet, and I didn't actually know how to build a coal fire. Pretty soon the neighborhood was filled with these black plumes. Then I took classes, and in 2008 when I was laid off I made it my main job.

### ***What are the challenges?***

Everything's hard. There's the physical: my elbow has arthritis, my pinky's always hurting. It's really hot in summer when the forge is going. Then there's the business aspect: making what I'm good at and turning it into a paycheck. And I purposefully try to incorporate new things into any job I do, to keep learning.

### ***What makes Olympia a maker city?***

It's a great place to make stuff, but selling isn't as good. The population and income base is small. It's a very supportive artist community, the synergy is good. But it's maybe too much a maker city. People see your work and they're like, "I could make that."

### ***Why do you love what you do?***

I like the concept of taking steel, which is cold and hard and kind of boring, and getting it to red-hot and making it malleable. And I like the toolmaking aspect — blacksmiths make all their own tools. It's a very self-sufficient art form.

## **DESIGNER PRINTMAKERS**

### **TIM AND APRIL NORRIS**

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**What they do:** Prints and cards of local street and mountain contour maps, seasonal holiday birch ornaments with Mount Rainier design.

**Bio:** Tacoma. April, 30; Tim, 26. They're married with 16-month-old twins and a baby due in May.

**They also:** Architectural design (Tim) and teach/play music (April).

**Find their stuff:** Etsy; craft fairs in Tacoma, Seattle and San Francisco; Tacoma shops such as Compass Rose, Satori and Evolve; also wholesale through the United States and Canada.

**Information:** [timplusapril.com](http://timplusapril.com).

As Tim and April Norris talk about their work in the lounge space of Tacoma's big-tool studio FabLab, they juggle plywood prototypes with milk bottles and chubby-cheeked toddlers. Married business partners, they're staunch advocates of Tacoma — it was partly through their application that the city was named an Etsy Maker City for 2016. Their clean, hand-drawn-meets-digital aesthetic has also won them local art installations, and two of the recent city of Tacoma traffic box wraps.

### ***How did you get started?***

The Norris' 2 1/2-year-old business, Tim+April, is about as old as their marriage: Tim, an architectural and furniture designer, moved to Tacoma three years ago and when he began dating April (an artist and Kindermusik teacher) he saw a design she'd made for a tattoo. It was a line drawing of Mount Rainier. Savvy with commercial production and the design world, Tim suggested making it into a print. The two began a new creative line — and got married, too.

### ***What are the challenges?***

April: It's a big blessing to be both working at home with twins. But with the perks come challenges: the daily ups and downs, growing the business, keeping excited about what we do when we're often just printing, packaging, printing, packaging. We're constantly exploring and evolving new things.

Tim: We've learned that I like to start things

and April likes to finish them ... it works well.

### ***What makes Tacoma a maker city?***

April: It's a good place for makers. The city is really supportive with grants, programs like Spaceworks, a network of people who care about small businesses and have hands-on suggestions and help. That's really special. And FabLab: I credit this place for bringing Tim here, where he could use their laser cutter and 3D printer for prototyping. It's an incredible resource that I don't think is used enough.

### ***Why do you love what you do?***

Tim: We ask ourselves that question a lot. We like the freedom of building something, living life where family and work are all the same thing. You get to travel more, like packing up the printers and spending two months with family.

April: More than just pushing our own product and making money, we like seeing other people start their own thing and helping them. We'd eventually like to do consulting for that.

## **METAL LAMPMAKER**

### **PAT TASSONI**

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**What he does:** Makes 1960s Space Age-style lamps and ornaments, especially ones that look like the Space Needle, out of salvaged metal items

**Bio:** Olympia. 50. Single.

**Find his stuff:** Etsy and eBay; craft fairs such

as Duck the Malls, Boom Gallery and Blackbird in Olympia; the Punk Rock Flea Market in Seattle

**Information:** pat-works.com.

Walk into Pat Tassoni's apartment and your jaw will hit the floor. His living room looks like a 1960s TV set gone wild — because Tassoni makes lamps and ornaments that look like the Space Needle. Some are desk-sized. Some are human-sized, like shy robots in a corner. Some hover overhead like a UFO. They have legs made of shelf railings, aluminum pipes, even crutches. They have hubcap bases, railing rims and tops made of thick midcentury glass platters — all salvaged from thrift stores, garage sales, even the side of the road. And that's not to mention the '60s TV tricked out as an LED fireplace, or an eight-track tape player the shape of an astronaut helmet.

Next door, Tassoni's spare room is outfitted like the console of the Starship Enterprise. A "Star Trek" fan since high school, he's also a craftsman who sees spaceship possibilities in industrial foam, knobs and scrap plastic.

But go behind the mysterious hallway door painted like a Doctor Who Tardis and climb the ladder to the attic, and you'll see where Tassoni's real work happens: a two-room chaos of screws, cords, glassware, chandelier parts, blenders, hubcaps and a single work desk.

***How did you get started?***

I was making lamps in high school — more taking apart my parents' things to see how they worked. I grew up in Bellevue, and the Space Needle was just always there. ... Then later I found a lamp with a three-legged base and I thought, if I just bend these to one side it would look like the Space Needle.

### ***What are the challenges?***

There aren't any really, I just do it for fun. Then I get rid of it (via Etsy and eBay) to get more room. Over the years I've gotten fairly methodical and I know what to do.

### ***What makes Olympia a maker city?***

It's definitely got a DIY culture. Look at my neighbor's chicken coop on the parking strip. Olympia also has a strong alternative culture: punk rock, grunge, the Riot Grrrls — they all started here. There are venues to show and sell work. People know each other.

### ***Why do you love what you do?***

It keeps me busy. I like interacting with someone who likes my work. I'm still surprised people like them, actually.

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## **IF YOU GO**

### **Tacoma is for Lovers Craft Fair**

**What:** A craft fair crammed inside a bookshop and

comic shop.

**Artists:** Include jewelry, letterpress, textiles, printing, salts, lotions, soaps, nail polish and more.

**When:** 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Nov. 19.

**Where:** King's Books, 218 St. Helens Ave., Tacoma.

**Admission:** Free.

**Information:** 253-272-8801, [kingsbookstore.com](http://kingsbookstore.com).

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## IF YOU GO

### Duck the Malls Craft Fair

**What:** A juried art craft fair wedged into the seats, stage and pit of the Capitol Theater that is a fundraiser for the Olympia Film Society.

**Artists:** Include potters, painters, printmakers, woodworkers, game-makers, lamp-makers, clothing-makers, toy-makers, jewelers, felters, quilters, weavers, knitters, crocheters, blacksmiths, photographers, authors, illustrators and more.

**When:** 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Dec. 10.

**Where:** Capitol Theater, 206 Fifth Ave. E., Olympia.

**Admission:** Free.

**Information:** 360-754-6670, [olympiafilmsociety.org/art-gallery](http://olympiafilmsociety.org/art-gallery).

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