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## Off the hook

Those expensive, lacy crocheted fashions that are so hot right now don't have to be budget-busters if you pick up a hook and some yarn, according to "Happy Hooker" Debbie Stoller.

**Delma J. Francis**, Star Tribune

Elizabeth McElligott, an eighth-grader at Northview Junior High in Brooklyn Park, just finished an ambitious crochet project -- a pink, yellow and orange afghan that matches the color scheme of her bedroom.

"It's really cool that you can pick out the colors that you want," said the 13-year-old. Elizabeth and her sister Allyson, 17, started crocheting about six years ago when mom Nancy was teaching Allyson for a Girl Scout project.

"Crocheting is something cool to do with yarn," said Allyson, a junior at Osseo High School. "A couple of weeks ago, I made a little round bag in an afternoon. I was just messing around with the yarn and created my own pattern."

The 200-year-old craft isn't just for grandmas making baby booties and doilies anymore. People in their 20s, teens and even 'tweens are hooking up with the craft through multigenerational classes and clubs, as well as the through explosion of hip new pattern books such as "Cool Crochet," [SweaterBabe.com's "Fabulous and Flirty Crochet"](#) and "Stitch 'N Bitch Crochet: The Happy Hooker."

You only have to look as far as your nearest department store or glossy monthly to understand why: Feminine crocheted fashions are all the rage -- dusters, shrugs, hats and bags -- often carrying hefty price tags. Design houses Prada, Chanel and Marc Jacobs have featured crocheted pieces in their collections. Doing it yourself is an economical way to achieve the latest look.

"It is your grandma's crochet, just not her patterns," said Debbie Stoller, author of "Stitch 'N Bitch Crochet: the Happy Hooker" (Workman Publishing Co., Inc., \$15.95). Stoller's book contains 40 original, fresh, youthful patterns and advice served up with humor. (On why crochet is her summer fiber craft of choice rather than knitting: "My preferred knitting method involves having one needle tucked under my armpit. Just think how well that would work on a hot, sweaty day. Yuck.")

Stoller, 43, has been leading a movement of hip young knitters with her New York Times bestsellers "Stitch 'N Bitch" and "Stitch 'N Bitch Nation," which together have more than 521,000 copies in print. In her latest, Stoller encourages crocheters to "do

what women have done for decades -- get together to learn [the craft] from each other and talk."

"Crocheters outnumber knitters three to one," she notes. Which craft does she prefer? "That's like asking me to choose a favorite child," she quipped.

Knitter/crocheter Stephanie Krebs would agree. Krebs often drops in at the SSK ("Sit, Sip and Knit") group that meets at Amazing Threads yarn shop in Maple Grove, which is owned by her mother, Bobbi.

"A lot of college students are [crocheting]," said Krebs, 18, a senior at Maple Grove High School who also takes classes at North Hennepin Community College. "It's very relaxing, a destresser. It's something I can do at night to wind down. For some people, it's reading or taking a bath. For me, it's crocheting or knitting."

Krebs learned to knit before taking up crochet, and though she finds knitting easier, the patterns for crochet projects are youthful and more fun, she said. "It's new to me, so hats and scarves are about as far as I've gotten, but I plan to take on some bigger challenges," Krebs said.

Dawnya Schulz, 29, of Maple Grove said crocheting's therapeutic qualities "got me through nursing school." Schulz, a registered nurse at the University of Minnesota Medical Center, learned from her mom when she was about 15 and the family was stationed in Germany.

"We used patterns out of French and Dutch crochet magazines. The language is unimportant because the instructions are symbols on a grid," said Schulz, as she sat around a table with fellow fanatics in the light, airy upstairs classroom at Amazing Threads.

Now she's teaching her daughter's friend, 11-year-old Anna Stangl. "She's so excited about her new yarns. She puts her crochet bag in her backpack." Schulz's daughter Caitlin, also 11, "just isn't ready yet," Schulz said. But she holds out hope for her 6-year-old son Sterling, who "likes to look at the yarn."

Schulz recently made a shawl like one she'd seen being worn by Jessica Simpson in a magazine photo. "Hers cost several hundred dollars. I spent about 60 bucks on the yarn," she said. In addition to making items for herself and her family, "I love giving things away," said Schulz, who sews "Handmade by Dawnya" labels inside her gifts. "It's a way to share."

Pam Wndestad, another member of the Amazing Threads SSK group, one of several that meet weekly, crochets for her friends, too. "I crochet those nylon scrubbers for nonstick pans," said Wndestad, 36, of Brooklyn Park. "Everybody loves 'em. If I don't have a bunch of them made by Christmas time, I hear about it."

Wndestad learned how to crochet from a friend about seven years ago. Her most enjoyable project was a purple sweater embellished with a "V," helmets, footballs and gold and purple buttons sewn in the shape of a goalpost. Can't tell *she's* a Vikings fan.

With so many appealing crochet patterns available, the craft has gotten a burst of energy and interest to inspire the next generation of crafters. But ultimately, Stoller says, crocheting is something people do just for the pleasure of it.

"It's so delicious to do it that it really doesn't matter what you're making," she said. "You just relax your mind and end up with something nice."

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## LACE AND RED LIGHTS

Ever wonder how the term "hooker" originated as a synonym for prostitute? It seems that during the 1800s, a lace manufacturer admitted that he expected his workers to turn a few tricks on the side to make up for his not paying them a living wage.

Soon lace, including crocheted lace, began to be seen as morally tainted -- made by prostitutes. And that's likely how the word "hooker" came to have such wayward connotations.

Source: "Stitch 'N Bitch Crochet: The Happy Hooker"

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**Check your local yarn shop for knitting and crocheting groups or start here:**

**Twin Cities:** [groups.yahoo.com/group/TCKnit](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/TCKnit)

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