

# Mountain dweller immersed in world of deep sea creatures

MICHELLE MACULLO – SPECIAL TO THE OUTLOOK

There are those who live in a Monday to Friday world. And then there are people like Catherine Nigrini.

At first glance, her life seems much like anyone else's in the Bow Valley. Nigrini is committed to and participates in her community. She works part-time administration duties at the Canmore Museum, a quaint space dedicated to preserving Canmore's coal mine heritage and educating both locals and visitors alike about the area's unique geology.

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As of late, Nigrini says, much of her time at the museum has been spent preparing for a move into Canmore's proposed Civic Centre, a move that would provide the museum with a larger space as well as other added benefits like humidity and temperature control to preserve artifacts.

"With climate control you can accept travelling exhibits," she says.

Nigrini, along with several volunteers with the museum, is also busy scanning and digitizing archival photos.

"We're taking advantage of that (technology)," she says. "It's a slow process but we're getting there."

And then there's her "other life".

Nigrini is one of a select few members of the scientific community who studies plankton — microscopic organisms that drift in the sea.

She works as part of the Ocean



**Canmore Museum volunteer Cathy Nigrini studies deep sea plankton in her professional life, but to relax, she's an ardent quilter.**

KRISTEN WOOD - PHOTO

Drilling Program with other scientists. While at work, Nigrini drills and studies core samples from the sea. She examines samples of sediment brought to the surface and fossils found in those sediments.

Each of the two ships involved in the program goes out for two months, with each two-month stint called a leg. She first set sail in 1968 on the second leg of the research project.

"Between the two ships I've pretty much sailed everywhere," she says.

Recently Nigrini participated in leg 199.

"I must be the oldest living deep-sea driller alive," she laughs.

And despite her rigorous schedule, she finds time to relax. All she needs is an assortment of fabric and a needle.

Nigrini loves to quilt.



It all began about 10 years ago in California when she and some friends gave themselves the task of putting together a quilt for a friend's daughter as a wedding gift. Everyone was given a square. At that time, Nigrini didn't know much about quilting, so she asked for some advice at a quilting shop and signed up for a class.

She's been crazy about quilting ever since.

Despite the current trend of machine quilting, Nigrini is committed to quilting by hand.

"People are always saying, 'Oh, you must have so much patience.' But if you enjoy it, it's not work. Washing your kitchen floor takes patience."

She calls herself a traditional quilter, sticking to historical patterns and styles.

Throughout the years it's become clear to her that she tends to favour bright colours.

Nigrini gives most of her quilts to family members and special friends. Each project is unique and made in the spirit of the recipient.

"They're real heirlooms. They should be kept in families."

Nigrini is one of about of 100 quilters in the Mountain Cabin Quilters' Guild. She couldn't think of a better organization to be involved with.

"The Guild is just marvelous," she beams. "It's a social thing. There's a great deal of friendship in the guild."

The Guild is known for its charity work in the Bow Valley and donates quilts to the Mounties to carry in the police cruisers for accident victims.

Guild members get together once or twice a month to work on projects or "just chat" if they don't have anything on the go.

Nigrini says getting together with other quilters is a great way to troubleshoot, find inspiration and discuss ideas.

In fact, Guild member Barbara West was so impressed by a rare book series of plankton sketches found in Nigrini's house that she created an intricate quilt based on them.

"Most people think of plankton as fish food," West explains.

"I looked at those sketches and thought 'something here calls to me.' I was amazed at how intricate they were for being single-celled organisms."

West used artistic license while creating the plankton, depicting them in shades of blues, greens and purples, rather than the yellows and greys that particular species is known for.

Nigrini is pleased with West's quilt.

"She's much more artistic than I am," Nigrini shares. "I follow directions nicely."

And when asked how someone with an aptitude for science would be willing to turn in her microscope over needle and coloured squares, she smiled and replied matter-of-factly: "We can't all just be single-minded."