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Flying the Winds of Spring

Some of your neighbors take National Kite Month very seriously

by Marilyn Recknor

Ten aircraft soar, bending and twisting in the gusty wind. Able commanders direct the attacks from the ground. Spring is in the air, and the battle for the sky is on at the Smithsonian's annual Kite Festival in Washington. It is March 27, the opening of National Kite Month, which runs until May 2.

Learn More

Check out Wings over Washington at www.wowkiteclub.com.

Look for Sky Dog Kites on Facebook to become a member of the Doghouse and check out www.skydogkites.com.

See Lennon's collage art 9am-5pm April 8-30 @ Gallery 333, Unitarian Universalist Church, 333 Dubois Rd., Annapolis: 410-266-8044.

Spectators watch in awe as rokkaku kites swoop and tumble. The Japanese made these six-sided fighting kites out of washi paper and painted tough Samurai warriors on the surface, but on this day, kites display the Haitian flag, Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, geometric and patriotic designs and a business logo. The object of rokkaku combat is to cut an enemy kite's line or tip it off balance until the kite dives and crashes. The last kite aloft wins the day and the applause of the crowd.

Susan Lennon of Riva, along with her team — Ripstop Girls and Screamin' Jim Cosca of Fort Washington — put up a valiant fight before their entry plummets to the ground.

The team is on a busman's holiday. Professional kite makers by day, they make kites their after-hours playthings.

The Pros at Work

Lennon caught the bug as a child when her father took up windsurfing on vacations in Nags Head, North Carolina. When the wind wasn't strong enough for windsurfing, the family flew kites. Years later, bored with a job in software, Lennon answered an ad from 29-year-old Premier Kites in Hyattsville. With her background in illustration and an

interest in children's imagery, this was her dream job.

Premier Kites are designed for mass appeal. Lennon watches the trends to figure out what people want. She visits toy stores like Be Beep in Annapolis to find images that appeal to children. Little girls love ladybugs and rainbows. Boys like pirates and frogs. Adults favor kites shaped like birds and fish, as well as patriotic and psychedelic designs. Cats, dogs and horses are popular with all ages.

Jim Cosca left Premier at the end of 2008 to form a rival kite company. With over 100 years of kiting experience among them, Cosca and his four partners thought of themselves as "old dogs with a new trick," he says, so they named the company Sky Dog Kites. Sky Dog is located in Connecticut; Cosca, the kite store sales manager, works from his home office in Fort Washington.

"We have focused our passion and knowledge to create the world's best flying, highest quality, affordable kites and wind décor," Sky Dog's web site says. The Kite Trade Association International gave them high marks in their first year: Sky Dog was named the Manufacturer of the Year and Sky Dog won credit for the best new product, a sport kite called the Black Dog Ultra Light.



A former exercise trainer, Susan Lennon now makes kites for a living at Premier Kites.

Obsessed with Kites

After the workday, Lennon handcrafts wind-seeking kites at home. Still not



While working for competing kite companies, Susan Lennon and Jim Cosca collaborated on kite design, and show their 2005 first-place winner at the Smithsonian Kite Festival.

satisfied, she fashions a purely decorative indoor art-form combining the translucence of kites with torn-paper collages, including historic newsprint and bits of nature.

Cosca is just as obsessed. A competitive kite builder, flyer and competition judge, he founded the Wings over Washington Kite Club in 1992 and guided it as president for seven years. Now, he's vice president of the Kite Trade Association International and is a director at large with the American Kitefliers Association.

In their spare time, Lennon and Cosca collaborate on designing kites to win big prizes. They haven't won the Smithsonian Rok Battle yet. But they've taken highest honors in other competitions.

Judges from the American Kite Association rewarded Lennon and Cosca for their 2005 Smithsonian festival collaboration, in which the pair built and flew a first-prize winner that took another special award for beauty in the air.

These high-end artists of kites are far from alone.

Who Doesn't Love a Kite?

Fascination with these flying objects probably began about 2,000 years ago in China, spread to Japan where each city had its own special kite, then across all of Asia. Today, interest continues worldwide. Maybe you flew kites as a child or have watched people flying them at Sandy Point.

Kids who don't forget the joy of flying a kite become adults who fly kites in all seasons, build kites, join kite clubs and love to share their passion with others. Just ask kite people about kites and their eyes shine, smiles light up their faces and they can't tell you enough about their hobby.

"There is something for everyone in kiting," says Jeff King of Cape Saint Claire, president of the Wings over Washington Kite Club.

Children and adults of all ages fly on their own and in events ranging from mini-shows to giant festivals. Members of the Washington club attend events up and down the East Coast and as far away as the West Coast, Canada, England and France. There are indoor and outdoor competitions for sport kites, kite-making workshops and kite fights. The most adventuresome try kite surfing, boarding and skiing, holding the lines of a giant kite that wind-powers their sport. Buggy-kiters ride dune buggies while holding the lines to a huge power kite that resembles a parachute.

The official kite season runs from April through October, but Wings over Washington flies year round, meeting on the Washington Monument grounds the first Sunday of every month except January, when they meet on New Year's Day.

Bay Area Community Church in Crownsville is host to indoor events. Broad beaches like Sandy Point State Park are popular for kiting.

—Marilyn Recknor

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1 Trick of a tiny belly :
 Cut down a bit of your belly every day by using this 1 weird old tip.

▶ Tip

