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Venetta Baker said she has never accepted limits on her life.

Blind since age 15, she earned a sociology degree from Meredith College. She joined the Peace Corps when some doubted. She earned a master's of divinity degree from a Kentucky seminary and taught Christian education in New Mexico.

So when a local employer refused to hire her because she suffers from a mild seizure disorder, she started her own home-based business, Love Me Knots Comfort Design.

Baker, 54, orders fleece from various suppliers around the country and makes comforters and throws in her West Charlotte home. She said she recently was invited to display her work at the "Christmas Made in the South" expo Oct. 24-25 in Kannapolis.

"Somewhere in my childhood, someone taught me that you can't let other people define who you are," she said. "The American Dream belongs to everyone, and everyone should dare to dream."

Like most entrepreneurs, Baker began her business with little more than a dream. She began making throws several years ago after an aunt gave her some fleece as a gift. Because Baker cannot use a standard sewing machine, she connected the layers of fabric with dozens of small knots, thus the name of her fledgling business.

To cut and shape her products, she sometimes uses a special guide made of plywood and nails. A special wire glove keeps a circular cutter away from soft fingers. Mostly, though, she counts on friends to help with the most difficult and dangerous parts of her work.

A baby blanket sells for about \$40; an adult throw, \$75. Doggie beds go for about \$50.

"I can do the whole thing without having to use a sewing machine," Baker says. "For a blind person, that's pretty good."

Baker said she makes her adult throws a bit generous in size: "When you're curled up, you don't want your feet to stick out. I know I don't."

Baker can describe each piece she ever made in vivid detail - the one with the golf clubs and fishing rods, the hummingbird motif, the Native American pattern.

And it's not just her own handiwork she admires. She describes the beauty of the rolling hills in Colombia, South America, where she worked in the Peace Corps soon after college, the hot air balloon festival high above the New Mexico desert.

And the two large wind chimes that stand sentry outside her front door: "They remind me that God is there," she said, "whether you can see God or not."

Baker said she sees only a little light and dark, "not enough to keep me out of trouble."

But appreciating beauty, she said, is not about having sight.

"I think people get very distracted by what they can see," she said. "God made the world beautiful not just for the people who can see it. Whether I see it or not, I know beauty is there."

Born in the old Good Samaritan Hospital, Baker grew up in Charlotte, the daughter of two teachers. She was 15 when doctors removed a brain tumor that, by the time of the operation, had damaged her optic nerve. The tumor also left her susceptible to mild seizures.

Her biggest worry when she woke up, she said, was that she'd fall behind in class. Her parents, wanting her to be independent, enrolled her in a school for the blind in Raleigh, then sent her to Meredith College. She joined the Peace Corps after graduation and spent a year working in a school for the deaf and the blind in a rural Colombian town.

In the years that followed she earned a master's degree from Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and taught Christian education at the Menaul School in Albuquerque, N.M. She even worked briefly as a telephone representative for the Social Security Administration.

Baker said she decided last spring to start her own business after an unpleasant experience with a potential employer. Needing money the previous Christmas, she said, she had gone seeking work at a federal contractor who hires blind people to sew straps used on military backpacks.

After telling her potential employer about her seizure disorder, she said, she was left sitting in a room alone for much of the day, then taken home.

"I decided then that I would never apply for another job," Baker recalled.

With help from small business advisors at UNC Charlotte, she developed a business plan and filed paperwork to register her business with the state of North Carolina and the IRS. She invested in a supply of fabric and printed brochures showing some of her work. She had business cards made.

Baker said she was thrilled to be invited to display her work at the Kannapolis Christmas show and has already started working on baby blankets. And although business has been slow, she said, "A lot has happened in a year. God has got me this far; I'm not going to worry."

To contact *Love Me Knots Comfort Design*, call 980-875-9100.

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