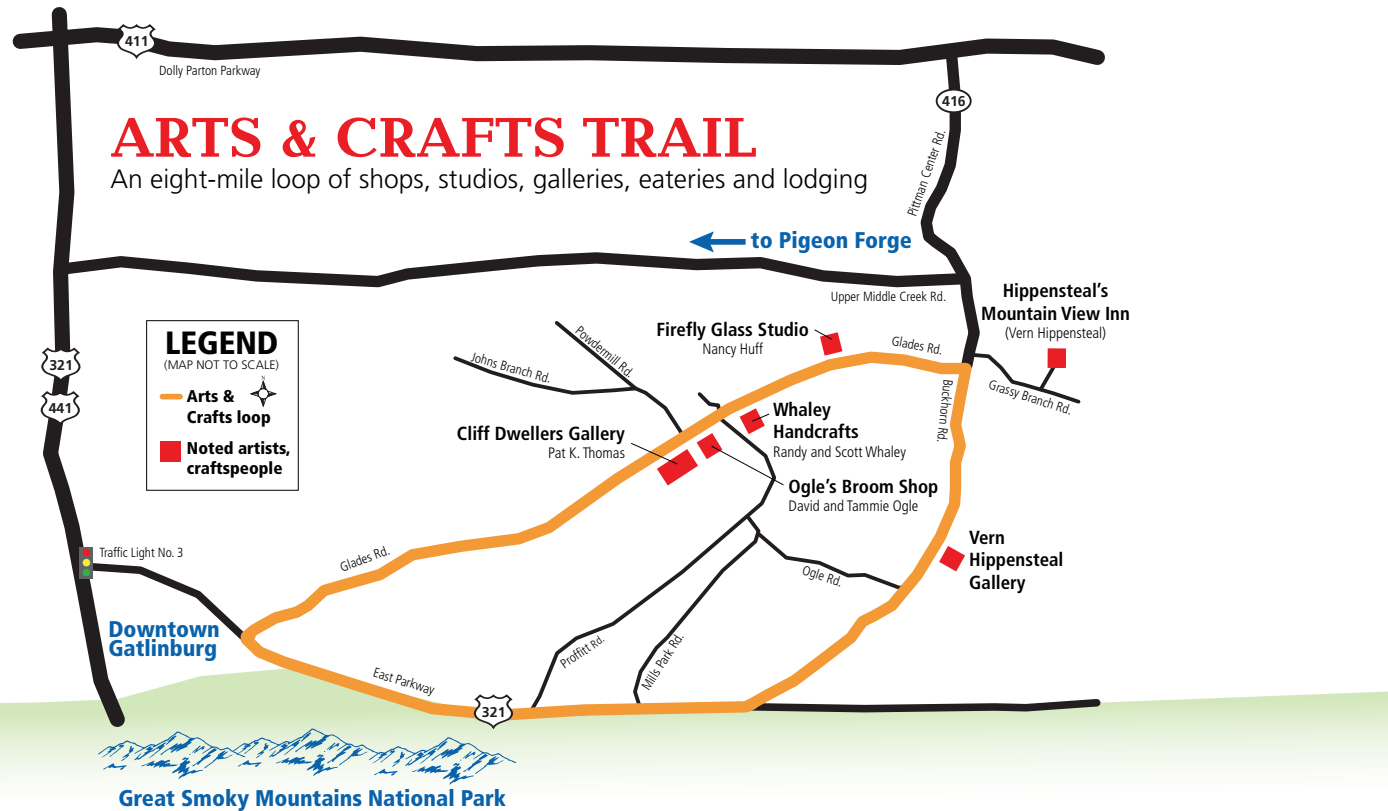


# Appalachian Artistry

Deep in the heart of the Great Smoky Mountains, a community of talented craftspeople keeps its regional artistic heritage alive and well.



A few miles from downtown Gatlinburg, Tennessee, a winding eight-mile trail invites visitors to take a trip into yesteryear. More than 120 artists, galleries and studios make their creative home along the Arts & Crafts Trail, and many of these locals still practice traditional Appalachian craftsmanship. With handmade selections ranging from furniture to jewelry to whimsical trolls, the encouraging community atmosphere has fostered artistic creativity for 75 years and has developed into the largest group of independent artisans in North America.

Loosely established in 1937, the community humbly began when a few local craftsmen grew weary of trekking

into downtown Gatlinburg every day to hawk their wares. Tourists were arriving in droves to visit the newly developed Great Smoky Mountains National Park, so there was demand; it was just exhausting and inefficient for the craftsmen to spend so much time away from their workshops.

So, they began to stay at home, a few miles from the hubbub of downtown, and invited the public into their workshops. Visitors were more than willing to come to the artists, and over time, more and more creative folks joined the community.

Visitors still flock to Gatlinburg for heritage-based vacations, and the artists and craftspeople along the trail seamlessly blend old traditions with new. For

example, David Ogle is a third-generation broom maker and a descendant of one of the town's founding families. Using techniques passed down from his father, grandfather and great-uncle, he and his wife, Tammie, continue to make brooms, canes and walking sticks, varying little from past utensils.

"My great-grandfather used to make brooms and bartered with them, and then when the park was getting started, my grandfather made one and some guy paid a whole nickel for it," Ogle quips. "That's where the business got started. I started learning when I was 9, and it became my permanent job when I was 13." Eschewing modern machinery, Ogle still uses his grandfather's tools to craft each piece by hand.



Map: Melissa Newman illustration; Kevin Tierney original; 1-4, 7: Kevin Tierney photos; 5: Danielle Taylor photo; 6: Gatlinburg Department of Tourism photo

1 & 2. David and Tammie Ogle's broom-making business has been a family tradition for 89 years. 3. Painter Vern Hippensteal also runs a family bed-and-breakfast near the north-east corner of the trail. 4. Woodcarver Randy Whaley learned his craft at his father's knee and has since passed on his legacy to his son, Scott. 5. This simple placard signifies an artist's membership in this distinguished community. 6. Pat K. Thomas uses thickened water and handmade combs to design intricate marbled paper and silks. 7. Glassmaker Nancy Huff's creations are grounded in traditional techniques and contemporary styles.



Another longtime resident is Randy Whaley, a woodcarver whose father opened the family's workshop in 1958. Today, Randy's son joins his father in their shop, where they create intricately detailed woodcarvings of birds, black bears, flowers and other natural finds. The family also preserves its tradition of hand-weaving; using the loom their great-grandfather built for his wife, Randy's cousin continues to make woven handcrafts and often sells them in Whaley's shop.

"When you make something with your hands, it's really gratifying," says Whaley. "These old traditional things, there's just not that many of them left. If you don't hang onto this stuff, once it's gone, it's gone."

In contrast to the traditional craftsmanship, a few artists specialize in more contemporary pieces. Nancy Huff of Firefly Glass Studio creates funky, colorful fused-glass designs that are used as sushi dishes, spoon rests, trivets and window decorations. Although her creations are clearly more modern than many others found along the trail, she's just as at home here as anyone else.

"The property my shop's on includes the house my dad grew up in," says Huff. "My grandfather bought it 75 or 76 years ago, and now my house and studio are on the same land." Growing up surrounded by the community's creative vibes, Huff always wanted to have a shop along the trail, and she found her way back after moving away for nearly three decades.

"The community's great," she reflects. "I've traveled a lot since I was away for so long, and it's the only place I've ever seen like this."

Dedicated as a Tennessee Heritage Trail, Gatlinburg's historic Arts & Crafts Trail is a treasure of eastern Tennessee's mountain culture and a fascinating side of the Smokies that's not to be missed. To get there, turn onto Highway 321N at traffic light No. 3 in downtown Gatlinburg, drive three miles and turn left onto Glades Road. **CBC**

## contact

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