Brief History of the Smocking Arts Guild of America

“To establish high standards of quality workmanship and to further the appreciation of smocking art and other associated handiwork through education and communication.”

That's how it all started . . . The first meeting of the Smocking Arts Guild of America (SAGA) was held on April 27, 1979, in Gatlinburg, Tennessee. Nine women interested in forming a guild for smocking and related handiwork attended the meeting. A constitution and by-laws were written, and the organization was duly registered in Knoxville, Tennessee.

The first seminar was held in Gatlinburg on October 5, 6, and 7, 1979. Eighty ladies, representing 18 states, were present. They held classes and elected their first slate of officers.

Since then, conventions have been held yearly at various locations throughout the United States. At each new convention, officers and representatives are elected and a great variety of classes are offered.

As SAGA grew, the need for membership representation became evident. In 1983, SAGA's Board of Directors recommended establishing regional representatives as part of the Board of Directors. SAGA members attending the 1983 Convention ratified the arrangement. Today there are five geographic-region representatives.

In SAGA’s early years it offered four to five issues of a newsletter each year. A magazine was begun in 1983 but discontinued in 1988 because it was no longer financially viable. In its place SAGA began publishing (and still publishes) SAGANews, a quarterly (with occasional special issues) geared to the specific interests of its membership.

Since its inception, SAGA has developed an Artisan Program through which members are encouraged to have their work evaluated. SAGA prepares a Trunk Show each year that is available for chapter viewing. There is a Wee Care Trunk Show, a sampling of items made by members for neo-natal units of our nation’s hospitals. Each Convention has a design show in which all members of SAGA are eligible to participate. Presently the Guild also has 25 quality programs (called SAGA Stitches) available for chapter use. The National organization also sponsors fifteen outstanding smocking and related needlework correspondence courses. These courses can all be taken individually. Several can also be taken as group courses.

SAGA maintains an online web site, www.smocking.org, filled with excellent smocking and SAGA membership information.

During SAGA’s early expansion, a management company was hired, and in 1986 the headquarters was moved to Reston, Virginia. In 1989 the headquarters changed to Lansing, Michigan and later to Glenview, Illinois, where a new management company was located.
As the century turned, SAGA became a self-managed organization. The elected Board of Directors, all dedicated volunteers, now not only establishes policy but also directs operations. These hardworking officers and region representatives, as well as many supportive volunteers, have helped the Guild continue as a successful needlework organization.

Although the Guild is still formally known as the Smocking Arts Guild of America, its logo now sharpens its focus with the words *The Association for Fine Needle Artists*.

With an ever-growing membership of over 2,000, SAGA offers classes, guidance, and support to those interested in smocking, fine hand sewing, fine machine sewing, and/or fine embroidery techniques.

Today the Guild continues to maintain its original objectives, but they have been recast in words that read:

“...to preserve and foster the art of smocking and related needlework for future generations through education, service, communication, and quality workmanship.”

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