

# CLEANING UP

## Rebecca Ford turns soap into art form

BY DEBORAH FREUND

Special to the Tribune

To some, soap is nothing more than an item used for a quick scrub-a-dub-dub in the shower or bath. But to others, including soap maker Rebecca Ford, it's a creative art form with a realm of pleasures and benefits.

Artisan Soaps is a business Ford started recently and she makes 35 varieties of the individually hand-crafted soaps. "My favorite is Ocean Rain," said Ford.

She also makes lip balms, cuticle salve, bath salts, laundry soap and offers accessories including pine and cedar soap bar dishes.

When asked what steered Ford in this direction, she explained, "I used to live in Lawrence and I used to go to the Merc. It is a co-op with whole foods — just a delightful alternative to the traditional grocery store. They would have handmade soaps and I just love those."

Ford moved here to take a job with the Dominican Sisters, writing and producing "Grains of Wheat" and taking care of a website. During that time she did a feature about Sister Imelda who makes soaps for the African missions. After Ford watched and took pictures of the process, she was inspired.

"I continued to order soap from the Merc after I moved here. I had been thinking about making soap since 2005 and it took until last fall to make my first batch, and then I was hooked," she said.

So, she assembled the necessary equipment, including stainless steel bowls, stainless steel racks and an emulsion blender — purchased from her neighbor's garage sale for \$3.

She also watched on-line videos, read and was cautious.

"I watched a video lesson about making soap. A woman left the pot on the counter for a split second



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Whatever name you call her, Rebecca Ford is enjoying making hand-made soaps for her business "Artisan Soaps."



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Healing Bath Salts are available through Artisan Soaps. Some doctors have used salts from the Dead Sea to successfully treat some skin conditions, as well as for relaxation and sore muscles.

and her toddler pulled down the pan," said Ford. "It was a memorable story that made me aware of the danger. It instilled a sense of having a healthy respect, not fear, but a healthy respect, and (being aware of) putting kids and pets out and focusing

on what you are doing," she explained.

"When you make soap basically it is a lye water mixture and an oil mixture. The lye gives itself up to make peace between the oil and water, because the oil and water usually doesn't mix.

It is chemistry. It causes the reaction so the oil and water will bond, and the lye is gone at the end of the process.

"The first 24 hours it sets in molds and then I put the logs on steel racks and it has to stay here for four to six weeks," explained Ford, adding that she uses wooden molds lined with freezer paper.

"My first soaps were not pretty but were still fascinating. I learn by trial and error," she said. She also attended the 2013 Central Soapers Workshop last March at Overland Park. The two-day workshop featured speakers, soap labs, a soap contest and an opportunity for new "soapers" to learn from veterans.

Ford now has a following of her own, teaching others what she has learned. On Thursday evenings a group of women come to help Ford with the various stages of the soap-making process.

"We have an assembly line: one weighing, one putting in essentials, others wrapping and cutting. I am so grateful for their help," said Ford.

Information about her products can be found on her website, [www.artisan-soaps.org](http://www.artisan-soaps.org).

Since Artisan Soaps is a second job for Ford (she works full time for Catholic Social Service), she is taking things slowly. She can be found at the Farmers Market in downtown Great Bend on Saturday mornings. Her soaps can also be found at Vines and Designs in Great Bend, and will soon be available at Aunt Susie's Gourmet Kettle Corn in St. John.

Ford hopes someday to have a brick and mortar store to sell her soaps and related products. But in the meantime, she is definitely taking time to smell the roses, and other wonderful scents, while doing something she loves.