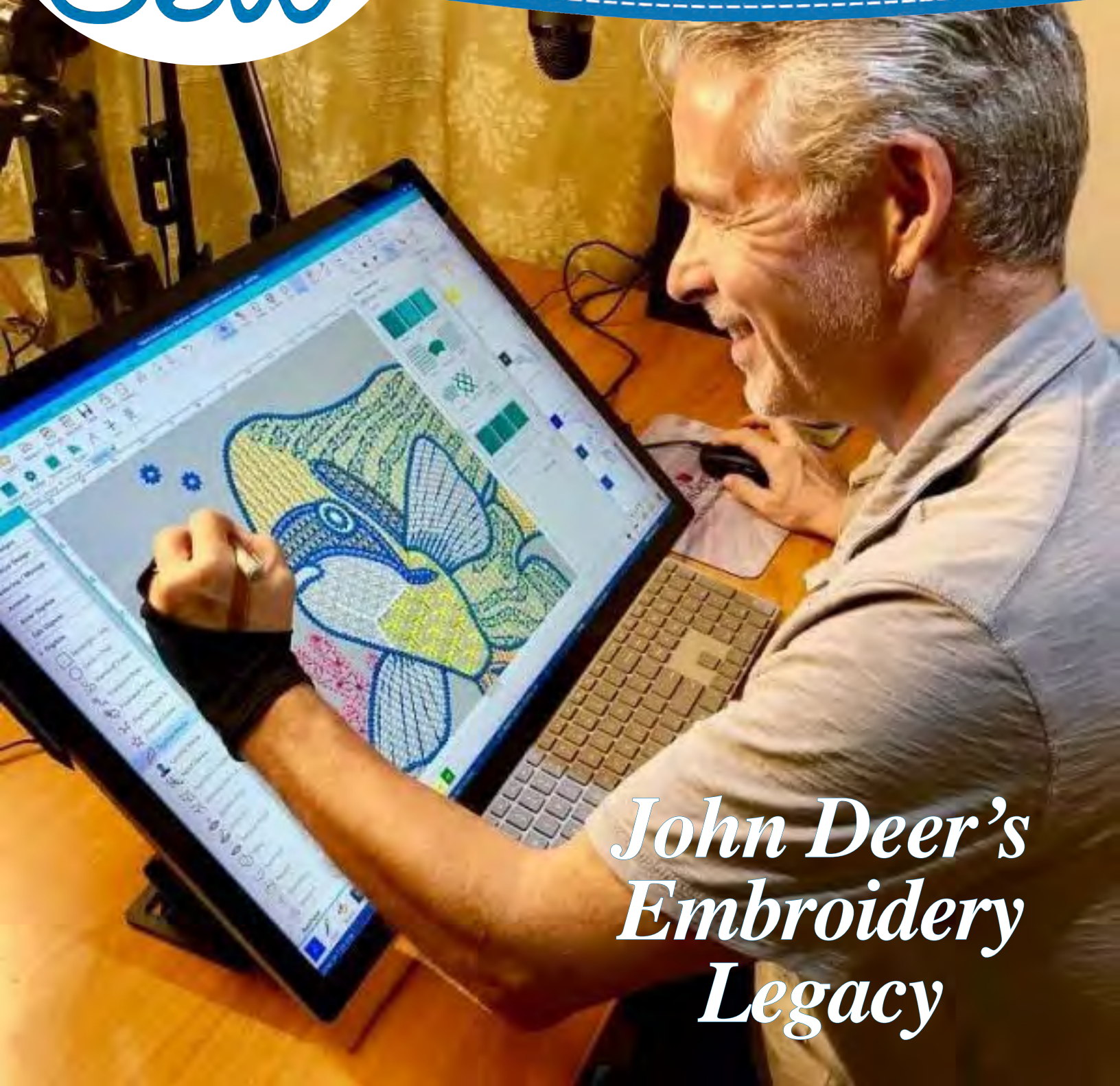


INSPIRED TO
Sew

*A glimpse into the creative heart of today's
most talented sewing & quilting artists.*



John Deer's Embroidery Legacy



Contemporary embroidery gives new life to a vintage kimono . . . and apparently makes Rhonda dance.

John Deer was initially interviewed for the previous issue of **SCHMETZ Inspired to SEW**. Did you see issue #90 with the awesome machine embroidery experts? As Rita Farro discovered, John was born into machine embroidery. It's in his blood . . . fourth generation blood. John learned manual "digitizing" with pantographs using 600 needle machines. Imagine changing 600 needles on just one machine! John is nimble and over the years pivoted his business and skills as required by time and circumstance. With generational blood, expansive experience, professional admiration, and a vast array of designs, we decided to dedicate this one issue to John.

Thirty thousand machine embroidery designs later, John now embraces his own family – wife, daughter, and two sons into the business. Each with their own role. That's five generations creating The Deer's Embroidery Legacy. If you are new to machine embroidery, let John's guidance inspire you to expand your stitches. If you already enjoy machine embroidery, John's expertise will elevate your stitches.

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Rhonda

Rhonda Pierce
Spokesperson, SCHMETZneedles.com
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-
- Layout/Design:** Paul Ragas

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Sewing
Star 

John Deer

E The Deer's  Embroidery Legacy

Issue #91





John Deer,
Sewing & Stitchery Expo, March 2018.

John Deer

Last month, *Inspired to SEW* focused on machine embroidery. While doing research for that issue, we interviewed John Deer. John Deer is to machine embroidery what Bill Gates is to computers. But maybe the most amazing thing is that his family has actually been in the business of machine embroidery for five generations. How is that even possible?

John's grandparents immigrated to Canada after WW II and worked at Grant Emblems in Toronto, Canada. John made a film about his family's history in the embroidery business on his YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC9mQiNJuVXtaVyyOcXhAWHg>



Embroidered Disney
characters from the 1970s.

In the video, you'll see footage of his grandmother, Irene Thaler, threading one of their original 1905 Schiffler embroidery machines.

The Schiffler machine was a game changer because it used a lock stitch, the same technique used by the sewing machine. By the early twentieth century, Schiffler machines had standardized to ten and fifteen yards in width and used more than 600 needles.

Early Schiffler machines used a manually operated pantograph to trace a pattern and translate the location of each stitch. Later, a card reader was used to program the machine. The punch card recorded the end points of each stitch. The conversion of the design into a punch card was known as punching.



John in the 1970s.

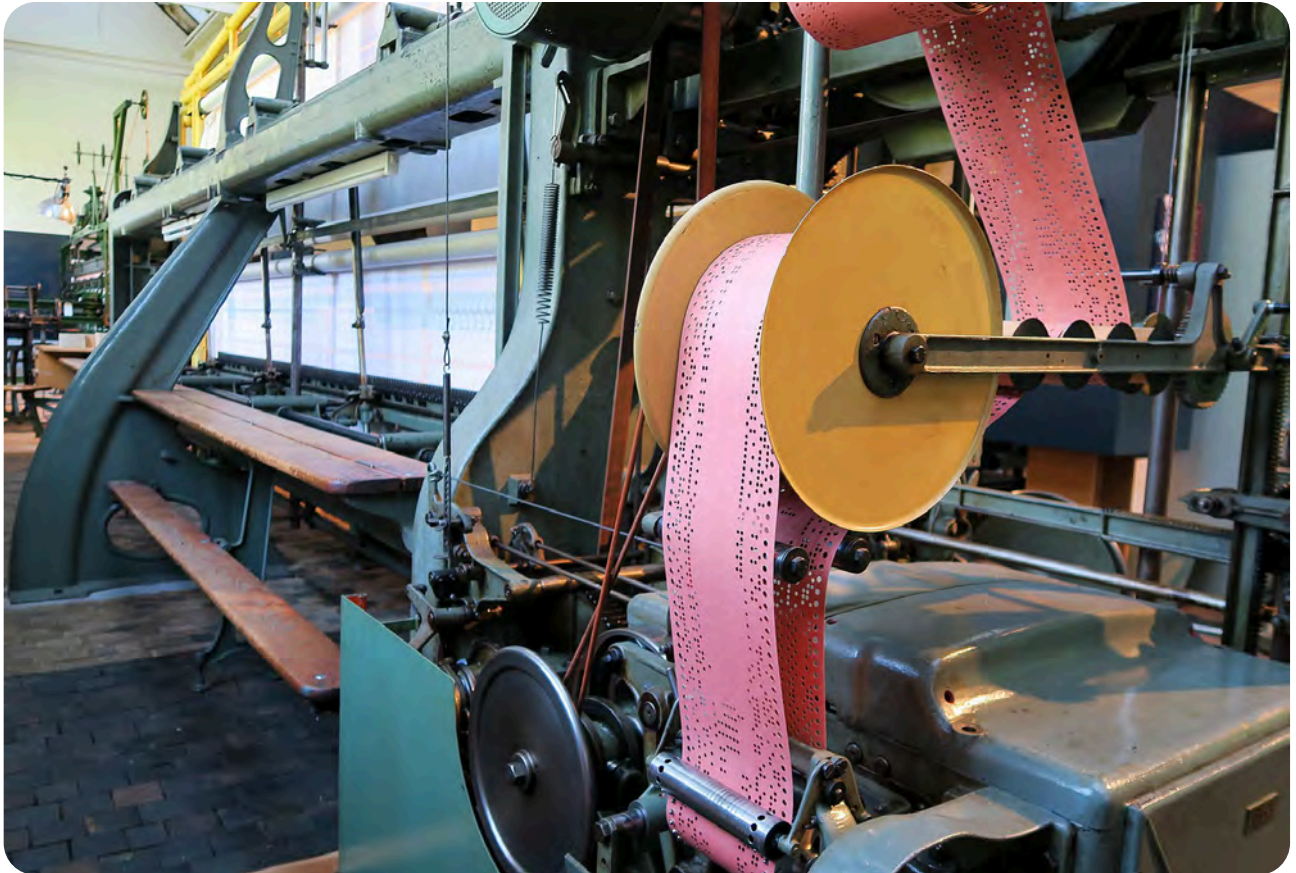


Fifth generation just before John's grandfather passed in 1992.

The first Schiffli embroidery machine was invented in 1863 by Isaak Gröbli. In 1898 Joseph Gröbli, the eldest son of Isaak Gröbli, developed the fully automated embroidery machine. The pantograph, and thus the operator, were replaced by a punch card reader. The mechanization of the embroidery machine was now complete. Schiffli machines were also used to create chemical lace. They embroidered onto a type of fabric, a foundation, that is later dissolved. Schiffli embroidery machines were a big part of the industrial revolution in the textile industry.

In 1958, with a loan from the Catholic Church, John's grandparents purchased their first Schiffli machine. It was a 1905 manual pantograph machine. (Forty years later, they sold that original Schiffli machine to a company in India, it's probably still working today.)

Originally, their embroidery business revolved around the garment industry. They embroidered lace and yard goods for wedding gowns which have since been converted into modern day lace embroidery designs that can run on home machines. They also made *emblems*, i.e., military patches and Boy Scout badges. John said, *My grandfather always said it was a penny business. I remember in the 70's my grandparents got an order for six million Brownie Emblems. They got paid four cents an emblem.* Recently, based off their old-school patch-making knowledge, John has also come up with some amazing new ways on how to make embroidery patches.

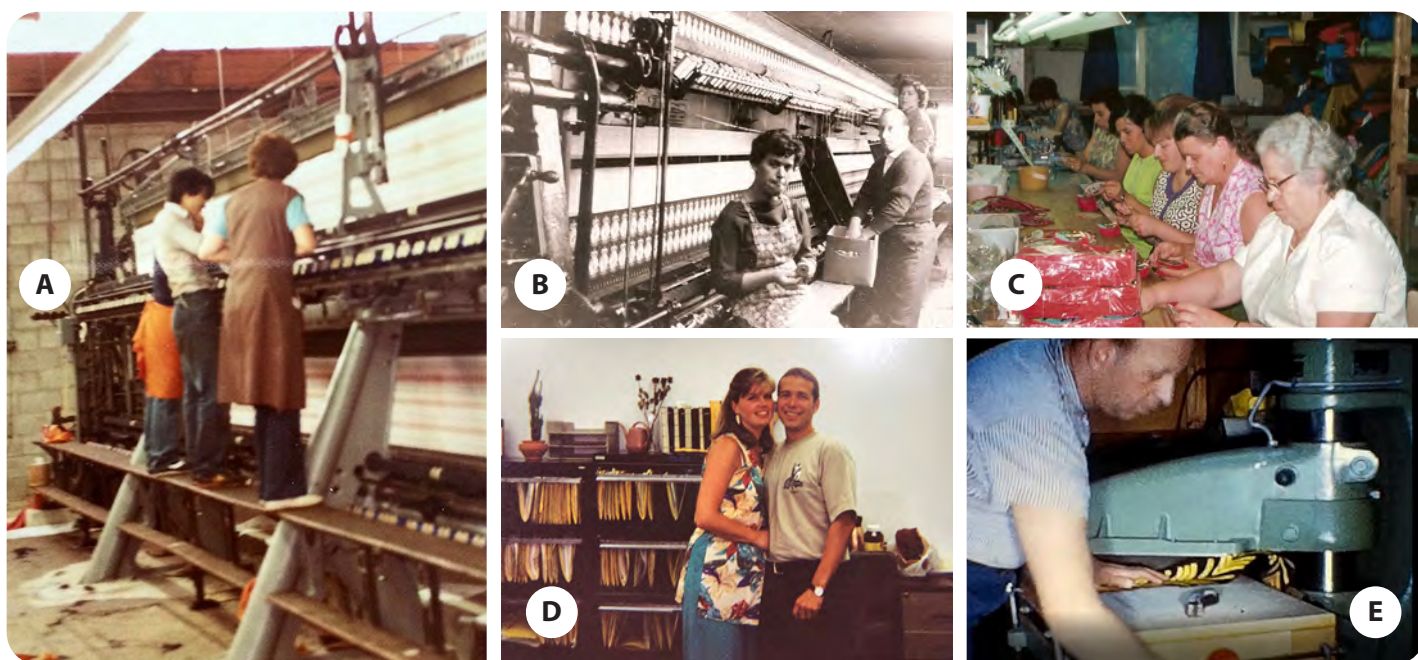


Card reader fully automated Schiffli embroidery machine.

John's mother, Brigitte, grew up in the factory, assisting in production and the office from the time she was a teen until she retired. By the mid-90s, Dress Crest Embroidery had two factories, six Schiffli machines, 136 multi-head machines and 50+ employees. The business had become all about mass production of badges, panel programs, and direct embroidery on caps and garments. They were producing 10 million pieces of embroidery a year and were one of the top volume embroiderers in North America in the late 80s and early 90s. In the early 80's, the emblem embroidery business was still thriving and with the invention of tubular multi-needle machines, Brigitte expanded their business to directly embroider on caps and garments.

John was born into the machine embroidery business. Their original factory was in a residential area and they lived in a small farmhouse on the property. The neighborhood, and John, both grew up around the Dress Crest Embroidery factory, as it was grandfathered in and allowed to operate. The reason for opening a second location was simply because residential bylaws would not allow expansion. When the original factory finally closed its doors, it was the last factory in the entire city of Toronto that was legally operating in a residential area.

There was no such thing as an eight-hour workday for any member of John's family. He saw his grandparents and his mother work every waking hour in the business, his great grandmother also assisted on the production line. He got his



A - Second factory launch, 1981.
 B - John's grandparents, 1950s.
 C - John's great grandmother, 1970s.
 D - Jen & John, mid 1990s.
 E - Clicker press that John used.

first real job in the factory, as a *clicker* when he was 12 years old. He operated the hydraulic press that punched out the emblems before the Merrow machines stitched around the edges.

From the age of 12, until he was 17, John worked every job in the factory. He learned how to Merrow, how to draft, he was a shuttle boy, and eventually, a Schiffli machine operator (i.e., an old-school digitizer). As hard as the family worked, they shut down the factory for two weeks every year, and took extraordinary vacations. *We always traveled as a family and we went to some pretty exotic destinations like Columbia, Barbados, or Jamaica.*

John never had the chance to attend university. *When I was 17 years old, my grandfather told me what I was going to do for the rest of my life. I was going to be a puncher, now known as a digitizer.*

I was born at the perfect time because I learned machine embroidery the old manual way. I apprenticed with the masters, sitting on a box, moving a manual pantograph, and doing designs one stitch at a time. You would have a handle in your hand, and as you moved the handle of the pantograph, following the design, the loom moved with you. These machines had a lower deck, and an upper deck, with as many as 680 needles depending on the quarter. We ran rayon thread (poly didn't exist in the early days), so your designs had to be soft, not stitch intensive, hundreds of needles running at the same time, spanned on 10 yards of fabric



Dragonfly



Cat Face with Flowers



Bulldog Cartoon



Frog with Umbrella



4th of July Word Art



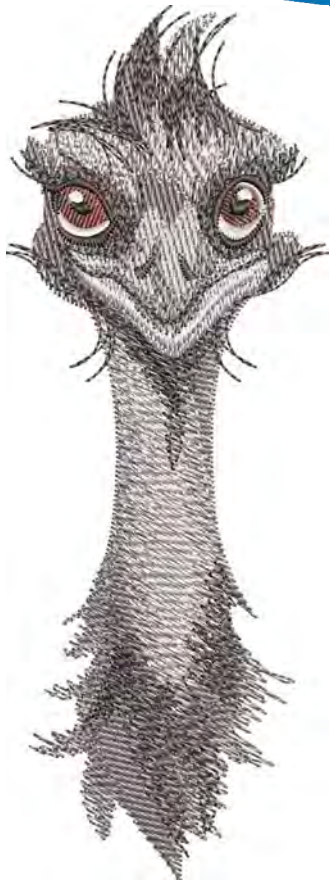
Canadian Moose

John has created 30,000 machine embroidery designs! His designs are neatly categorized on his website.

on each deck. Designs were first drawn on a piece of paper, then the paper tacked on the pantograph. The drafts/patterns were drawn with rulers and pencils at a 6 to 1 scale using pattern wheels which had numbers marked beside them. If there was a 6 on a wheel it meant .6mm of space between each penetration, a 5 would be .5mm, that's how you controlled density. The embroidery was done with rayon thread, and if the design was too dense, the thread would break, which was a HUGE problem because you had to rethread hundreds of needles.

When John was 19, they got their first computerized piece of equipment. It used binary code, and the old guys thought it was black magic. John embraced the new technology and he became the official company computer guru. Those first computers could program color changes, stops, etc.

In the early 90s, garment embroidery moved overseas, and their business had to pivot once again. John launched a digitizing company and he became one of the most successful and respected digitizers in the commercial embroidery industry. During this time, he won 30 awards for his digitizing and worked for large companies like Disney, the NFL, and even, ironically, John Deere. He wrote many educational articles for industry publications and began teaching other professional digitizers. To this day, John is well known as one of the most knowledgeable educators for embroidery digitizing and even offers a free digitizing 101 course online to teach embroiderers of all levels some digitizing essentials.



Outback Emu Face



Happy Marlin



Outback Koalas



Stocking Stuffers



Uncle Sam Hat & Fireworks



Lil T-Rex



Retro Art

What design will you embroider next?

As embroidery machines came into the home sewing market, it was only natural that John would teach at consumer sewing shows. The Sewing and Stitchery Expo in Puyallup, Washington was the first venue to invite him. His classes were wildly successful and he quickly became one of the most sought-after speakers on the sewing show circuit.

John Deer is an incredible digitizer and he knows it. What that means is that he, personally, does or oversees all the digitizing for his designs. *I'm really fast at what I do because I was a production based puncher. There are 30,000 machine embroidery designs available on our website, it's my life's work. My designs embroider beautifully because I understand the basic principles that take the designs from the computer screen to the sewing machine. My designs are soft because I learned embroidery using only rayon thread, and any breakage meant we were losing money every minute.*

There are such incredible machines available now. But the problem is, no matter how great the machine is, if the designs you run are poorly digitized, your end result will be mediocre. If the machine starts pounding like a drum, it is always because of a poorly digitized design. Sadly, many people don't know the difference.

Poorly digitized designs are a common problem caused by two different issues. The first issue is that "digitizers" never leave their computer screen. They actually never see the design as it sews out. So, they don't understand the problem they create when they use too many stitches to get from one place to another. What looks fine on the computer screen stitches out dense and stiff, causing the dreaded "pounding."



John with sons James & Jesse,
Sewing & Stitchery Expo, March 2018.

Secondly, that beautiful polyester thread we all know and love. Polyester thread is so strong, it would cut your finger before it would break. That strength has allowed terrible designs to come into the market, with stitches on top of stitches.

In John's webinars, he says your machine should purr like a kitten, it shouldn't growl like a dog.

John met the love of his life at an early age. He was 17 and Jennifer was 15. *She's the one who actually keeps us all in line. I have a very addictive personality and I might be prone to spend too much money on wild ideas. She's always been the voice of reason.*

After they married, Jennifer came into the business as the Chief Financial Officer. They had three children who grew up traveling as a family and watching their Dad teach at trade shows and industry events all over the world. John never expected or wanted his kids to come into the business, because he always felt like he was forced into it. John wanted his children to know they could make their own choice.

It is a very happy turn of events that all three of his children have been drawn into the family business.

John's son, Jesse, went to university and worked in the corporate world, moving quickly up the ladder to a managerial role with a large corporation. It was just long enough to know that was not what he wanted to do with his life and wanted to



The Deers all together, pre-Covid,
James, Jesse, Beth, John and Jen.

define his own ceiling. When he approached his father about coming into the family business, John said it struck his heart. Jesse has spent the last six years rebranding the business completely. He rebuilt the The Deer's Embroidery Legacy website and is responsible for the marketing and internet presence.

James, the youngest, is the artistic one in the family. He was the one most interested in digitizing and running the machines when he was growing up. It was a natural fit for him to take over the video development and interactive education. He created the YouTube channel and is in charge of the content for their various internet sites. He built their studio and is responsible for the production and direction of their videos.

Daughter Beth, the oldest, has taken over logistics, purchasing, and the elephant in everybody's room, social media. John says, *Beth is like her mother, she came into business at the perfect moment in time. Social media is such a big part of what we do now, with Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and a YouTube channel. It's a lot, but it is how business is done now and it's wonderful to have her in charge of all that.*

Having the fifth generation come into the business has brought about some big changes. When Jesse came in, he immediately said CDs are a thing of the past and the way to deliver the designs is via e-commerce, direct to the consumer. He organized John's life's work into dozens of alphabetized embroidery design categories.



John Deer's CaricaStitch of Rhonda Pierce and Rita Farro.

John continues to be the creative heart of the business. One of the fun new projects John is doing is embroidered *CaricaStitch*, which is launching this month. John is doing it strictly for the fun factor. There will be a webpage with instructions. Customers will submit a photo, which will be sent off to their talented artist, Daryl, who will draw an original caricature. Then, John will digitize it. For \$99, you'll get the original art AND the digitized design of your face. Of course, Rhonda Pierce and Rita Farro were the first to jump on this fun opportunity.

John Deer's family has machine embroidery in their DNA. When John's children came into the business, the whole structure changed. *It just felt right. It was time, AGAIN, for us to let the business evolve with the times. Because the times are ALWAYS changing and the trick is to value our knowledge and experience, be open to learning new things, and recognize when it's time to pivot."*

The Deer's Embroidery Legacy
<https://www.digitizingmadeeasy.com>

✦ — written by Rita Farro



Needle Points with Rhonda

SCHMETZ Machine Embroidery Bundle



This pre-picked "bundle" offers a selection of three needle types for Machine Embroidery. Includes the following:

- Embroidery Needles, one card
- Embroidery Gold Needles, one card
- Super NonStick Needles, one card
- SCHMETZ Luggage Tag Color Chart
- SCHMETZ ABC Pocket Guide

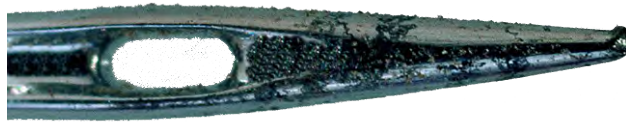
**Item
#1904**

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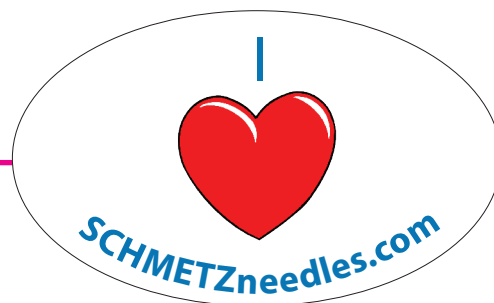




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