

Bear fever hits town!

MRS Eunice Beaton
collects and makes
bears



SINCE the time when Teddy Roosevelt refused to shoot a baby bear on a hunting trip, the popularity of teddy bears has grown.

And, according to bear-maker and collector, Mrs Eunice Beaton, bear fever has just started in KwaZulu-Natal.

"Lots of people are now taking more notice of the bears in their cupboards," she said.

Eunice started making teddy bears in 1985, and when her first attempt was a success, things took off from there.

In 1995 she participated in one of America's largest bear festivals and earned third place for her Kalahari bear.

It now takes Eunice about six hours to make one bear, depending on the size, and she also finds time to teach bear-making to other enthusiasts.

"I mostly enjoy designing my own bears, although I do make up designer bears as well. Every time you make a bear, it turns out differently. You can make three different bears from the same pattern," she said.

"I wasn't a collector in the beginning, but as I started moving in bear-making circles, I couldn't resist bears that other people had made," she said.

"I would often buy a bear that commemorated some sort of occasion, or reminded me of something - like my trip to the Bear Artists' Festival in the UK."

She said every collector had different tastes when choosing bears. Little girls tended to collect bear accessories and a range of playmates for their bears, while serious collectors were always on the lookout for bears that were different.

"Most collectors buy bears that appeal to them, although some bears are bought for investment," she said.

She said bears of yesteryear, especially the early 1900's, were worth a lot of money if they were in good condition.

And it seems that playing with teddy bears is not only for little girls.

"A mother has already said to me as soon as her daughter has gone to school, she plays with her bears and changes their clothes. It's a form of escapism," she said.

According to Eunice, bear collecting and making is definitely going to become as big in South Africa as overseas.

"But if we want the bear market to grow, we have to stimulate the public. Bears are no longer just toys. They're now an art form," she said.