

# FLIGHTS OF FANCY



Ornament designer to appear at annual Holiday Mart shopping event.

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For the past 10 years, the Holiday Mart fund-raiser for Operation Aware has been bringing Tulsans the best in holiday gift ideas.

This year, shoppers are in for a special treat. Karen Rossi, known to many collectors as the designer of Fanciful Flights ornaments, will be making an appearance at the annual holiday shopping extravaganza.

Rossi, whose Holiday Mart visit is sponsored by Silvestri and Tulsa-based Tapestry of Faith gift shop, will autograph her creations and chat with collectors about the Fanciful Flights series, which features whimsical, flying figures created from painted steel and representing a variety of activities, hobbies and professions.

Rossi's business got its start in the early 1980s while she was teaching at an art center near her Connecticut home. Rossi had begun creating artwork with metal - a talent she developed while working in her father's welding shop -and was approached by some students' par-

ents who had opened a folk-art gallery. They asked her to create pieces for a show.

The gallery owners suggested Rossi try creating a likeness of Gabriel, the herald angel, a popular motif in early New England history and signage. In her research of the subject, Rossi found that nearly all of the early portrayals featured Gabriel in a flying position - something that piqued her creativity.

"The more I learned about it, the more I fell in love with the concept of (creating) flying figures," Rossi said in a phone interview from her studio in Windsor Locks, Conn.

For that first show, Rossi created several flying figures, including mermaids, in addition to the likeness of Gabriel. Sales at the show were so encouraging that Rossi began exhibiting her works at trade shows and in galleries, eventually building a multinational client list.

Today, Rossi's designs are licensed through several companies, with a wide variety of product choices available, from metal sculptures and ornaments to embroidery patterns and dolls. Her products have been featured in national publications such as Southern Living and are sold by some of the country's most famous retailers - Macy's, Bloomingdales and Nordstrom, to name a few. Celebrity collectors such as Lucy Arnaz and Howie Mandel have also been known to include Rossi's creations in their collections.

In addition to licensed products, Rossi also creates commissioned works and in 2001 was selected as one of several artists from the state of Connecticut to create an ornament for the White House Christmas tree.

Most of Rossi's work is done in her Connecticut studio, where she creates 25-30 new characters each year, some of which are licensed and marketed through companies like Silvestri. Creating characters is a lengthy process, during which a design may take up to a year or more to go from the drawing board to store shelves - those that Rossi is currently working on likely won't hit retailers until 2005.

"Some days you just move right along, and then on others you're just stuck," said Rossi, who's usually working on three or four characters at once.

The Fanciful Flights collection currently includes more than 400 characters, each of which is personalized with special trinkets, charms and decorations. Professions, hobbies, religious figures,

charitable organizations and even horoscope signs are all part of the collection.

Characters include Zelda the Animal Shopper, a flaxen-haired shopaholic sporting a black marabou boa and perfectly manicured red nails along with the requisite credit cards, cash and shopping bag. The Chocoholic character is dressed in a heart-printed outfit and carries with her necessities such as a tin of cocoa, a heart-shaped box of chocolates and a frozen fudge pop.

Often, Rossi will do extensive research into a subject before molding it around one of her Fanciful Flights characters. In the case of her zodiac ornaments, Rossi says she tries to include symbols and characteristics unique to each sign. The libra ornament, for example, features a painter's palette, a gavel and a rose, which allude to the artistic, balanced and romantic qualities associated with people born under that sign.

Rossi said she enjoys creating what she refers to as "celebratory figures" those that are uplifting or strike a chord with collectors- and seeing them become part of collector's lives. With 400-plus characters in the Fanciful Flights series, one might wonder if Rossi herself has a favorite.

"I'm of northern Italian descent," she said. "I love the cooking and food characters."

## holiday mart 2003

Holiday Mart 2003 will begin Thursday at Expo Square and run through Nov. 23. Event hours are 5-9 p.m. Thursday, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Friday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Nov. 22, and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Nov. 23.

Items for sale include gourmet food, books, furniture, art, holiday items and apparel. Special events include an anniversary coffee and a diamond-seeking contest.

Artist Karen Rossi, designer of the Fanciful Flights ornament series, will be at the Tapestry of Faith booth from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Nov. 22. Tulsa artist Bobbie Whaling, creator of the 2003 Tulsa ornament, will be at the booth from 1-3 p.m.

Tickets to the event are \$6 for daily admission, \$8 for a four-day advance pass or \$10 for a four-day pass at the door. Proceeds benefit Operation Aware of Oklahoma and its drug- and alcohol-abuse prevention programs.

For more information, call 582-7884 or visit [www.operationaware.org](http://www.operationaware.org).