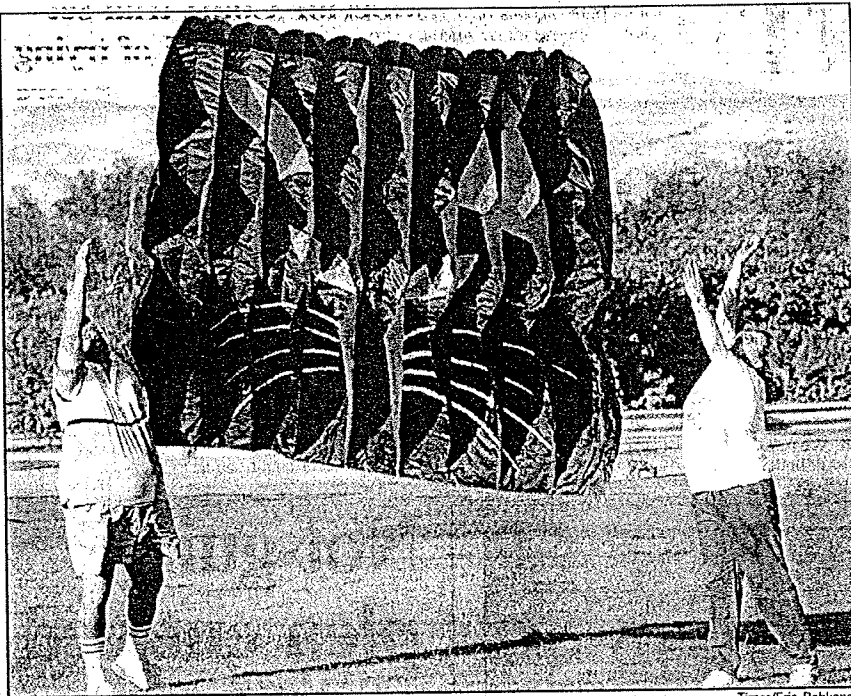




CONTRA COSTA



Times/Eric Rahkonen

ED AND BONNIE WRIGHT of Clayton lift one of their kites into the wind at a local park.

Making and flying kites give Clayton couple a lift

By Andy Jokelson
Staff writer

CLAYTON — You won't have to tell Bonnie Wright and her husband Ed to go fly a kite — or to make one.

Kites are their passion. They've made hundreds of colorful, intricately designed kites in a spare bedroom at their Clayton home, typically spending 40 to 60 hours on one. They fly and demonstrate them, Sundays.

"We're doing it for the joy of it, because we love it," said Bonnie Wright, 46. She enjoys the pleasure that other people get from seeing their kites in the air, she said.

They specialize in a soft kite called a parafoil. Inflated by the wind, it's sewn from pieces of nylon and has no sticks or other rigid components.

Their parafoils feature spectacular sewn-on designs. At last weekend's Berkeley Kite Festival, one of their parafoils had a black cat's face with hot pink ears, blue eyes and white whiskers.

"They're challenging," said Bonnie Wright, who does most of the sewing. "You've got a good variety of designs you can put on 'em. They're a nice paint board for us."

"I just like the way they fly," said Ed Wright, 48, who is principally responsible for the design.

"And it's such a nice piece, a nice shape to do your graphics on." Those sometimes feature celestial, geometric or bird-like forms.

Their parafoils are usually about 90 inches wide and 80 inches tall. They are inflated by wind filling cells that run from the front to the back of the top of the parafoil.

"And it just looks like a big flying mattress," said Bonnie Wright. It's usually attached by 30 dacron "bridle" cords to a bigger dacron flying line, held by hand or by a stake in the ground.

"We usually try to keep 'em pretty low so that you can see ... what the design is, but high enough so that you've got some good wind," said Bonnie Wright. Last Sunday, the parafoil with the cat's face was about 200 feet in the air.

Once the parafoils are made, "you don't have to put 'em together, so you can get 'em in the air quicker" than other types of kites, Bonnie Wright said. Each can usually fold into a small duffel bag.

The Wrights, who have no children, work for the federal Internal Revenue Service in San Francisco, she as a management analyst and he as a computer analyst. They get up about 4:30 a.m. on weekdays and ride BART from Concord to work. They return home about 6 p.m.

"I sew for a couple of hours in the evening — also Saturdays," said Bonnie Wright.

"I also sew," said her husband, "and then I usually do the cutting of the fabric. And then, when it's assembled, I attach all of the bridle lines and tune them to make it fly properly."

The materials sometimes cost about \$200 per parafoil, he estimated.

The kites usually are not for sale, but occasionally the Wrights trade kites with others or are commissioned to make them.

The Wrights began flying kites regularly about 10 years ago. They'd seen a boy flying stunt kites in Hawaii and were impressed.

"We said, 'Wow, wow, we have to do that,'" Bonnie Wright recalled. "We hadn't seen kites that could do the things that he was making the kites do," like circles, figure-8s and other stunts.

So they flew stunt kites, but stopped after about two years.

"I mean, how many times can you go around in a circle. ... We wanted to see if we could make our own," she said, and they tried six types before settling on the parafoil.

Their parafoils have won honors from the American Kitefliers Association. So has a lean-to, a design featuring 16 quilt patterns, that sheltered them at kite-flying events for three years.

Making and flying kites took them to Europe for the first time last month. The two-week trip included a week at an international kite-fliers' meeting on an island off Denmark where "they've got the best winds in the world — steady," said Ed Wright.

The couple call their enterprise Wright Brothers Kites. Ed Wright noted that aviation pioneers Orville and Wilbur Wright are credited with creating the first maneuverable kite as part of research that led to the development of the first successful airplane.

"And we thought it would be appropriate to name ourselves the Wright Brothers, even though we're not brothers," said Bonnie Wright.