

Stitch N' Pitch Homerun Events

by Libby Butler-Gluck



"Knitting Detroit Together" — Detroit Tigers game

Knitting and baseball? Crocheting and a catcher's crouch? Yep! Building on the success at the Seattle Mariners event in 2005, **Stitch N' Pitch** events have been popping up all over the USA and Canada. Fans in the thousands are going to baseball games to knit, crochet, embroider, cross-stitch, and needlepoint, sit together with friends, family, and colleagues. Offbeat and unique — thousands of needleartists turned out for games. This year 26 Major League Baseball Teams will host these **Stitch N' Pitch** events, which may include teaching expos, special giveaways, and surprises. Local needleartists (and baseball fans), guilds, and groups will come by car, bus, and train to be a part of this new needlearts craze — **Stitch N' Pitch!**

Two years ago The National Needlearts Association (TNNA), the nonprofit organization dedicated to the advancement and promotion of needlearts, formalized the program and began marketing the event concept to their members. Tickets were sold through TNNA member retailers and wholesalers, needlearts guilds, and other interested groups. In 2005, word quickly spread through email blasts launched by local shops, popular craft blogs highlighting the program, and needlearts groups posting regular updates and announcements. Utilizing unique guerilla marketing tactics and promotions resulted in massive groups attending these events and the official **Stitch N' Pitch** website receiving over 1 million hits the first season.

Patty Parrish, Executive Director of TNNA explains, "We are thrilled with the success of this program! Our mission is to get the needlearts into the public eye and what better way than at a baseball game?"

Combining these two wonderful traditions made sense to us and, most importantly, it's FUN. What was once an out of the box idea has developed into an amazing program that has 'team spirit' — it resonates with our needlearts community. We have a wide demographic of people attending with needlearts projects in hand—women, men, and children—it's just fantastic."

The public interest in the program has continued to grow with the outreach of the program reaching as far as Europe, Asia, and Australia. Last season, a team in Tokyo contacted the program, showing interest in bringing the program abroad after reading a New York Times Sports article highlighting the New York Mets **Stitch N' Pitch**. While taking the program international definitely proves exciting, TNNA is concentrating on capturing all of Major League Baseball Teams first. The positive momentum of the program has taken it to 26 teams in just 2 years. Andrea Larson, Minnesota Twin Communications Manager explains, "**Stitch N' Pitch** is such a great event, and we have enjoyed working with The National Needlearts Association to host it the past two years. It's a creative idea, and a fun way to reach an audience with so much passion for their craft, and encourage them to come on out to the ballpark together with their friends and family to share in our passion for baseball. The event keeps growing every year, and our Twins Wives Organization has even gotten on board for 2008, and they are excited to participate this season." This year the program will expand with the inclusion of the Minor Leagues. With over 150 Minor League Baseball Teams, TNNA will maximize their exposure with more events and by offering support to these ballparks too.

CRAFT Magazine saw the value in the program and ran regular blog features and updates on their popular website. They even sponsored a baseball-themed needlearts contest in 2007 where crafters



Stitch N' Pitch banner at the Houston Astros game



Team Logos Crocheted Afghan
Los Angeles Dodgers game

were asked to send in original needlearts patterns along with finished projects. Natalie Zee Driev, CRAFT Magazine Senior Editor explains, "CRAFT Magazine really wanted to create a contest to see what kind of baseball crafts people could create through knitting, crochet, cross-stitch, needlepoint, and embroidery. The projects that were entered were amazingly complex with a sense of whimsy, from a baseball card crochet bag to a knit and



The Designated Knitters—Minnesota Twins game

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baseball card crochet bag to a knit and felted hot dog. All of the winning projects really represent the sense of fun that happens at the **Stitch N' Pitch** games! Other entries included resourceful products like team logo baseball socks and team color blankets to novelty creations like a felted beer cozy and a crocheted baseball necklace.

Since each team reserves a large section of the ballpark, many **Stitch N' Pitch** events had attendance in the thousands like games at the Seattle Mariners and Philadelphia Phillies. Most cities had local shops getting involved by selling tickets and others even provided transportation. Last season, Cindy Loeffler of Alamitos Yarn Company in Long Beach, CA, and Stephanie Steinhaus of Unwind in Burbank, CA, all rented buses to transport their customers to the Los Angeles Dodgers **Stitch N' Pitch**. Jennifer Wenger, owner of Jennifer Knits in West Los Angeles, CA, says, "This will be my third year participating in the Dodgers **Stitch N' Pitch** event. In 2007, my daughters, my staff, and I attended along with 50 of my clients. We cheered our home team, ate Dodger dogs, and did the wave all while busily knitting and crocheting! It's a great way to promote camaraderie and creativity as you are approaching a slower time of the year."

One **Stitch N' Pitch** fan loved the idea so much she coordinated her business meetings so she could attend as many of the **Stitch N' Pitch** events as possible. Deborah Murphy or "losethemittens" on Ravelry, who is an avid knitting and baseball fan, explains, "I work in sales for a publishing company, and I thought I might be ambitious and try to plan my meeting schedule so I could attend at least four or five of these events. As it turns out, three was the magic number; I went to the Los Angeles,

Kansas City, and San Francisco **Stitch N' Pitch** events, which were all different and all a whole lot of fun."

This season the **Stitch N' Pitch** program will be conducting fundraisers in each city for a wonderful needlearts program. The Needle Arts Mentoring Program (NAMP), a program of The Helping Hands Foundation, has been established to create community partnerships that promote and encourage relationships between adults and youth, fostering curiosity, creativity, and a feeling of achievement through the teaching of needlearts. As of May 2007, the programs can be found throughout 29 states with over 140 programs of volunteers touching the lives of over 3600 children. For more information on how to start a

needlearts mentoring program near you, go to www.needleartsmentoring.org

People interested in attending **Stitch N' Pitch** events are encouraged to go to www.StitchNPitch.com to preview the 2008 schedule. This season, if you watch carefully, you might "catch" a knitting contest, team mascots wearing handmade colorful scarves, images of men knitting, teaching tables full of children learning how to needlepoint, needlearts designer celebrities in attendance, a Ceremonial First Pitch with a ball of yarn, and so much more!! Stacy Charles, owner of Tahki Stacy Charles, a popular wholesale yarn company in New York, simply adds, "**Stitch N' Pitch** is a great way to show our knitting strength in numbers, have fun, and root for the home team."



Knitters at the San Francisco Giants game

Baseball & Needlearts! Celebrating Two Timeless Traditions!

Watch the game while you knit,
crochet, embroider, needlepoint and
cross-stitch. All needlearts are
welcome. Bring your family and
friends!



In 2008, 26 Major League Baseball
teams are hosting **Stitch N' Pitch™**.
Some Minor League teams are too.

Find a list of Teams & Dates on
StitchNPitch.com



Newbies at the Teach Me 2 Crochet table