



### Pinestraw Basketmaker

Kathlene Thomas is a member of the Clifton Choctaw community of Clifton, Louisiana, in western Rapides Parish. Kathlene learned how to make pinestraw baskets from Pearl Tyler around 1980. Encouraged to continue working with this traditional art form, Kathlene has become the acknowledged master of coiled pinestraw basketry in her community. Kathlene's baskets, which have been juried by the Louisiana Folklife Program, are constructed from longleaf

pinestraw. This straw is gathered in the spring or early fall, when the straw is best suited for making baskets. After gathering the pinestraw, it must be cured for three to four weeks. Basketmakers like Kathlene are very particular about the curing process. She says, "The drying area must be relatively cool, as too much heat will dry out the straw, and it will have no flexibility. If the straw becomes too brittle, it must be discarded because it cannot be coiled without breaking."

Once the straw is cured, the ends of the straw, (that part which was attached to the limb) must be snipped off. At this point, Kathlene sews the dried pine needles into coils with either natural raffia, a commercial thread called Swiss straw, or manufactured nylon thread that comes in various colors. To these coiled baskets Kathlene often adds designs of her own creation; she works in red, green, and black raffia.

Although Kathlene moved away for a time in 1994, she is now back in the Clifton community weaving her beautiful baskets; thus, preserving the tradition of her ancestors.

Kathlene has participated in the Natchitoches-NSU Folk Festival, at Williamson Museum's Indian Basket Day activities, and the Louisiana Folklife Festival in Monroe. Her work is on display at the Clifton Choctaw Crafts Center on Highway 28, and she participates in Clifton Trade Days held every May.