Women turn unwanted items into decorations for the home

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Books are treasured by Kathie Laakso, Jean Bjerke and Val Broste, but they aren't just for reading.

Kathie Laakso has packed her home with books. Some are meant for their traditional purposes, but others are transformed into decorative pieces.

The woman and two of her friends, Jean Bjerke and Val Broste, all of St. Cloud, earlier this year started Book Women 3, a book refurbishing company.

The friends rescue unwanted books from libraries and thrift and antique stores. They then turn them into lamps, decorative stacks, book hooks and cut-out letters. They sell their creations at Gypsy Lea’s in Sauk Rapids.

“We love books,” Bjerke said. “We don’t want them to go into the landfill.”

The business is set up in Laakso’s garage. The women worked together at Marketplace Counseling in Waite Park. Laakso recently retired, and the friends wanted to stay in touch.
The trio always liked doing arts and crafts. They started talking about books and brainstorming ideas they saw on the website Pinterest.

"In this digital age, we want to find a way to display books so they can be of focus," Laakso said.

Their first project was a book cut into the letter K. The book, "The Martha Rules," by Martha Stewart, has a light green cover. The women decorated it with an antique knife and stamp.

The letters look nice displayed around the home, the women said.

Another project is a lamp featuring an Edison light bulb on top of two computer and technology books. It's clever, the women said.

Book hooks have hooks glued on books. It's perfect for holding items such as jewelry, they said.

“We love to read books, talk about books and display books," Laakso said. "It's a natural extension.”

Laakso carved out room in her garage for a work space. Her late husband, David, liked to work on building projects, so she kept his tools.

The women learned how to work power saws, band saws and sanders.

Stacks of books fill the garage. The women would like to expand their offerings by adding items such as chairs and headboards. For example, they will replace the chair’s seat with books.

Cutting into the books can be difficult though, the women said. They save some titles that they can’t bear to dismantle.

Laakso recently picked up a book from 1889 at a used bookstore in Alaska. The book was just too interesting to use.

And sometimes the women start reading the books they are repurposing.

“It slows down the process,” Bjerke said.