



## Ugly is the new beautiful?

### Sterling woman abandons aesthetic appeal for unusual jewelry contest

By Cortney Casey  
C & G Staff Writer

STERLING HEIGHTS — It's hard to purposely achieve hideous, as Sharon Wagner learned while preparing her entry for the 2010 Ugly Necklace Contest.

"It's very difficult, because your eye wants to find symmetry; your eye wants to find balance; your eye wants to put colors together that are appealing," she said.

But by combining household devices and garish embellishments, the Sterling Heights resident accomplished it, netting the self-declared "dubious distinction" of being among eight semi-finalists in the international competition.

"The whole idea is to break those rules and make you uncomfortable when you're looking at it, make it uncomfortable to wear," she said. "It was quite a challenge."

Land of Odds, a website that sells jewelry-making supplies, puts on the annual contest, which reportedly has garnered entries from all 50 states, England, Canada, Sri Lanka, Turkey and other countries over the last eight years.

"It turns out, because of the way our brains are pre-wired, it's very difficult to create something truly ugly," said Warren Feld, president of Land of Odds. "Even if you begin with all ugly pieces, once you organize them into a circle, that very act of organizing makes them look less ugly, and sometimes even beautiful."

Wagner, who specializes in off-loom bead weaving, said she toyed with the idea of achieving ugly in a figurative sense by making her piece symbolize a distasteful concept, like racism.

But she found it difficult to communicate something so abstract within the guidelines, so she ultimately went the literal route, intertwining traditional jewelry components like thread, craft wire and seed beads with billiard ball slices, cell phone charger cables and coaxial cables.

She began working on it in January; in February, she showed it to a national jewelry-making teacher in town to work with the Great Lakes Beadworkers Guild, of which she's a member.

"He said, 'Well, I'm getting the ugly.' That was encouraging," she laughed.

When she's not aiming for ugly, Wagner creates jewelry that she calls "wearable and



Her arrangement of cell phone cords, coaxial cables, beads and sliced billiard balls helped Sharon Wagner of Sterling Heights become one of eight semi-finalists in the Ugly Necklace Contest, a competition run by jewelry website Land of Odds.

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fun,” often incorporating vivid colors and bold shapes. She sells her pieces at craft shows at local schools and churches.

Feld said Land of Odds received 32 Ugly Necklace Contest entries this year. The winner and runner-up receive \$992.93 and \$399.07, respectively, to spend on products in the store’s online catalog.

Voting on the semi-finalists’ submissions, which counts as 25 percent of their total score, is open on [www.landofodds.com](http://www.landofodds.com) through July 15.

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