

Beach woman gives birds of peace to Olympics

She designed and made the kites that replaced live doves on opening night.

BY STEVE STONE
STAFF WRITER

VIRGINIA BEACH — While sponsors and vendors trumpeted their contributions and journalists mined every nugget of hype in Atlanta, one Olympic task was completed in uncharacteristic secrecy — and in the true spirit of the Games — in Pungo.

And thanks to Marguerite E. Stankus, white doves flew 100 strong in celebration of peace as the torch was lit and the Centennial Games of the

modern Olympiad kicked off Friday night.

“God, it’s an awfully good feeling,” said Stankus, 56, who designed the child-borne kites that fluttered aloft in place of real doves - satisfying both Olympic tradition and animal rights activists.

“I never realized it was actually happening until I saw it on television,” Stankus said Sunday “I woke up at 5 in the morning and started to cry”

Words of praise poured in to the Stankus home on West Landing Road over the weekend after NBC commentator Dick Enberg told millions of viewers of her work.

Yet, while appreciative, she isn’t reveling in the moment of fame.

*Please see **Kites**, Page A2*



CANDICE C. CUSIC/The Virginian-Pilot

Marguerite Stankus had eight weeks to design, manufacture and deliver 275 kites - and she could say nothing about it.

Kites: Beach woman races the clock, gets doves to Olympics

Continued from Page A1

“My name will soon fade. It means nothing. What is important is that dove,” Stankus said. “To give the dove of peace to the world is one of the most wonderful things we can do. God gave this country a purpose, and if we give the world peace, we have served our purpose.”

There might have been no peace doves to give in Atlanta, however, if not for her efforts.

International Olympic Committee rules dictate that doves be sent aloft as part of the opening ceremonies — a testament to the original spirit of the Games, which were held despite any wars or conflicts of the day.

Animal rights activists made clear their opposition to releasing real doves, however. And Atlanta organizers feared a conflict. They settled on using dove kites and launched an international hunt for a designer.

From China to Seattle, they found disappointment. Then they called Jackite Inc. in Virginia Beach.

Stankus, whose “Incredible Jackite Osprey” kite launched her

company and career in 1988, has fashioned several other bird kites since.

Certainly making a dove would be easy. Well, not quite.

Stankus was told she would have just eight weeks to design, manufacture and deliver 275 kites.

“I just rolled it around for a few minutes and said, ‘Yes. I’ll give it my best shot,’” Stankus said.

Her first stop afterward was the library, where she read everything she could about doves. Then it was off to the Oceanfront.

“I sat on a pier and watched pigeons fly all day,” Stankus said. “I had to understand their flight.”

Finally, she designed a prototype and sent it to Atlanta. “They just fell in love with it,” she said.

Then the real work began, with one stern command: Stankus could say nothing about her project. The Olympic committee wanted the appearance of the doves to be a surprise on par with the final hand-off of the torch relay.

Stankus saluted and set to work. DuPont shipped the needed fabric, Tyvek, which is resistant to water and to rips.

It was cut to size in Richmond and sent to Teagle & Little Inc. of Norfolk for printing in gold and silver. Meanwhile, Virginia Die and Manufacturing Inc. in Virginia Beach cast the die to make the final cuts.

The whole lot was shipped to Baltimore for actual cutting of the 275 doves.

The final week of assembly work at the Stankus home was a round-the-clock rush by family, employees and even neighbors to meet the June 23 deadline. Fold, glue, attach snaps, tiny eyes and rings with wires. Nine pieces in all. Plus written instructions to make certain each dove would be properly suspended from the poles the children would carry.

“It was close,” Stankus said. “We had to dry them with fans,” because there wasn’t enough time to let nature alone set the glue.

Finally, the doves - each with a wing span of 42 inches - were off to Atlanta. They made their grand entry Friday night before the president, the athletes and the world.

“I had several people call and say, at first, they thought they were live birds,” Stankus said. “All of a sudden, they realized there were children under those birds.”

Stankus was among those watching from home. She could have been in Atlanta - her son Christopher went. But she stayed.

“I can’t think of any other place I’d rather be,” Stankus said. “I had my family around me and my friends. We all stayed awake and watched on TV. It was wonderful.”

Her doves flew in the Olympic sky, their wings swaying, dancing gracefully on the evening breeze; a flock of white, of hope.

Of peace.