

## **Sculptor adapts to a new plan Debby Tendler carves out her niche as an artist**

*By Sybil Blau NEWS-TIMES CORRESPONDENT*

Some people allow life to lead them. Going with the flow, they accept life's challenges with a smile, a tear or a shrug. Others plan their lives to such a degree that any challenge throws them for a loop. Then there are those who plan, but know that plans are often subject to change. Debby Tendler fits into the last category. She plans and, if the plan changes, she adapts. The wife of Realtor Bob Tendler and mother of Jared and Jessica, Tendler reached a point in her life about eight years ago when change beckoned. As the kids were getting older and Jared was heading toward college, I saw the space that would exist between motherhood and wifedom, she recalled. Tendler, who had been one of the town's super volunteers among other things, she had been an active school mom, worked on the Newtown Labor Day Parade committee, taught Sunday School and was a president of Congregation Adath Israel found that she was also burnt out with volunteer work. The Bridgeport native gave much thought about her personal growth. What would she do to fill that space? I remembered taking a portrait sculpture class when I was 12 and how it impacted me, she explained. So I went back and took a sculpture class. At first, we worked in clay, but when we began working with stone. I went to that immediately. Tendler, a gracious person with a ready smile, also enjoys oil painting and photography but felt at home with stone sculpting, describing it as the cream that always rose to the top. Enjoyable though it was, stone sculpting wasn't enough for her. She decided to go back to school for a master of fine arts degree, but she soon came to the conclusion that that wasn't what she wanted either. I've always been drawn to psychology, she said. I realized the relationship between psychology and art. I applied for and was accepted into Pratt Institute's master of art therapy program. It's a cool program, she continued. It's very intense. We have 30 hours of course work per year. Those 30 hours are condensed into five weeks of actual class in the spring and summer. Two weeks are spent at Pratt in New York City; three in campus in New Hampshire. The rest of the year, we write papers and work at internships. The program seems to fit Tendler, 51, like a glove. Through art, we can explore and express our reactions or responses to things around us, she said. Art is so personal. It's like taking a chunk of our gut and presenting it for viewing. With the belief that art is a mirror to the mind, Tendler, as an intern, has led creative growth workshops for children age 9 through 13 in psychiatric facilities in the state. We use art materials to explore the inner self, she explained. Art is used to further define and access who we are. I help bring to the surface what a person is subconsciously thinking and have them express that thought through art. Her schooling and experiences as an artist have left her with very definite opinions about the creative process. We destroy creativity in the name of technique, she said. Since art is a personal expression, everything is a success, she added. How can we judge self-expression? My training, she noted, is that the process is more important than the product. After completing course work this summer and writing a thesis, Tendler will have earned a master's degree in professional services, an MPS, she said. Then it takes 1,000 paid hours as an art therapist to become a registered American Art Therapy Association therapist. Eventually, Tendler, the female golf champion at Rock Ridge Country Club, would like to go into private practice. Until then, she has her sculpture, her private joy, which she has never stopped pursuing. I get lost in it, she remarked. Here and there in her home are the stone creations of her mind and hands. Most of them are made from alabaster, the stone she favors for, among other reasons, the color choices it offers. This was my first piece, she said, pointing to a sculpture of a cat in a curled, sleeping position. Situated near the living room fireplace, it looked quite peaceful. Tendler recently completed her first commission, admitting that it was a challenge for her. It was the reverse of what we are talking about, she said. I was used to working from the inside out, not the outside in. I wasn't sure I could do it. I wasn't sure I could work from someone else's idea. The completed commission proved she could. This woman, who said it took a long time to call myself an artist, truly is one. She creates things of beauty and helps others to do the same.