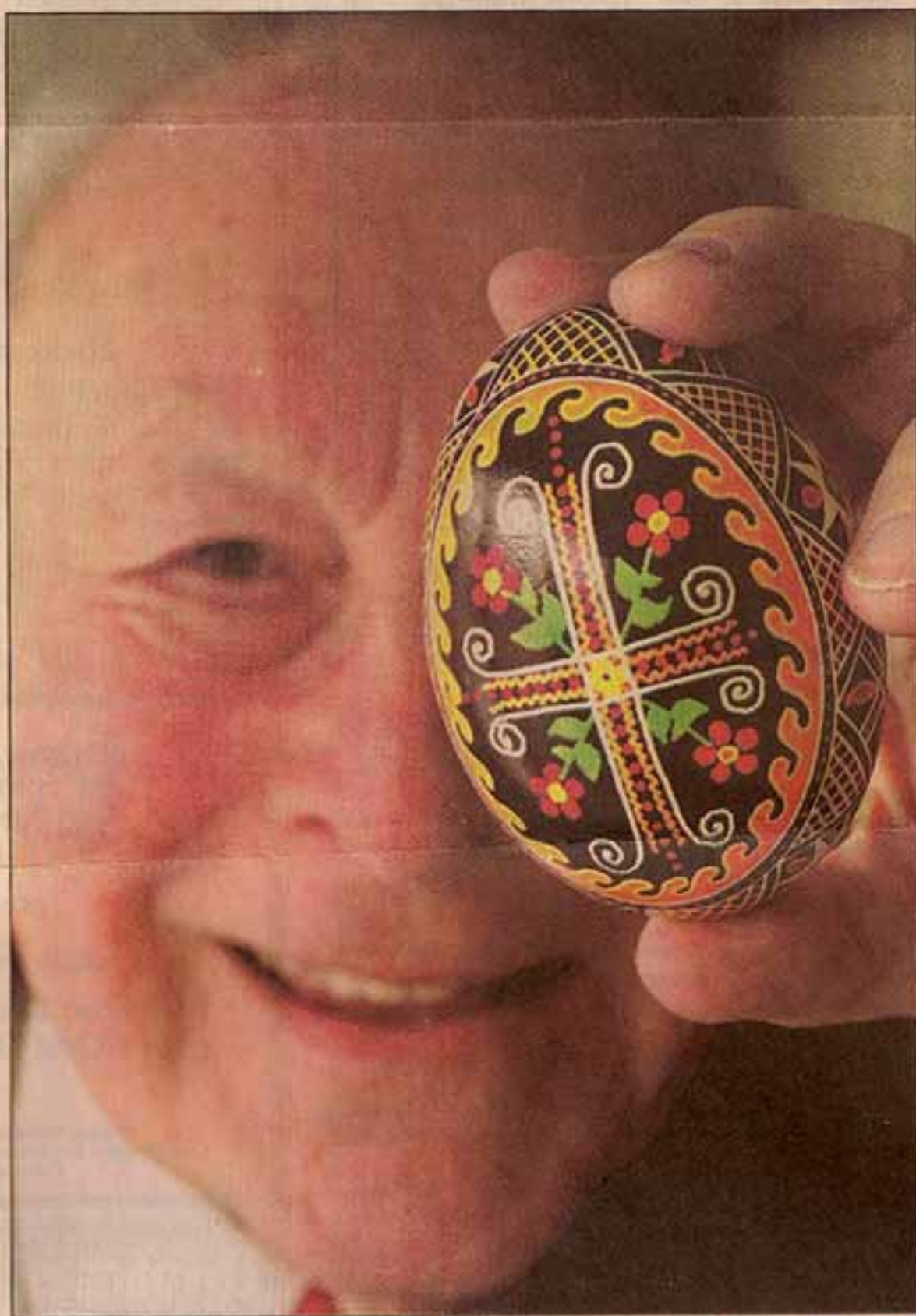


MORE THAN A THOUSAND STORIES



JEFF WILLHELM - STAFF PHOTOS

The Rev. Stanley Stiver shows off a Ukrainian egg from his collection. Along with his extensive collection of crosses, Stiver's eggs adorn tables around his home.

His crosses to bear

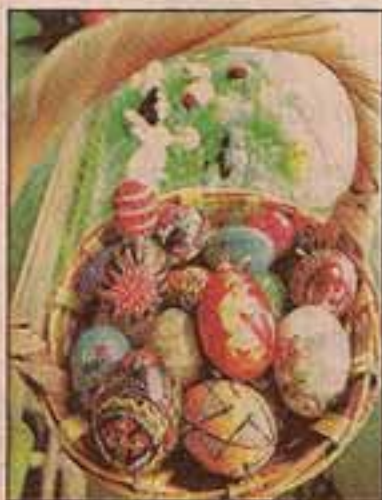
Ex-pastor's vocation, travels have yielded a formidable collection

BY MARTI ROOKE
Staff Writer

HICKORY — The Rev. Stanley Stiver of Hickory is a fortunate collector.

His 49-year passion for crosses has blended with his vocation and his travels, and his knowledge about each cross's history has made him a sought-after speaker by civic groups, churches and senior citizens' organizations.

The retired pastor has a collection of more than 1,000 crosses from 46 countries. Some are only a few inches long. Others are almost a foot.



The triangle designs on the eggs represent the symbols for the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

They are made of wood, silver, brass, pewter, straw and other materials — some on Ukrainian Easter eggs.

Many are of simple construction, others ornate, with

intricate details. No two are alike.

One of Stiver's first crosses was a gift from a parishioner in 1948, shortly after he became a pastor. Since then, he bought crosses in airport gift shops during church business travels, in Europe and the Middle East during a trip to the Middle East in 1967, and in museums and churches in other countries he and his wife, Jane, visited over the years.

He always learned the history of each cross.

He was invited to set up his display of crosses at the Southern Christmas show in Charlotte 1975, where it drew so much attention from the public that Stiver was invited back by the show owner, and his crosses were at the show

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He's collected 1,000 crosses

Pastor *from IV*

every year until 1995.

That's where the word got around about his collection. People started calling him to give talks about it, which he loved.

His collections have expanded to include other religious icons, like pysanky - Ukrainian Easter eggs - generally handmade in the form of either painted raw eggs or carved wooden eggs, decorated in ancient times to celebrate the renewal of nature and life in spring, honoring the sun, which warmed the soil so that foods could grow.

With the introduction of Christianity to Ukraine in 988 A.D., the ancient customs were absorbed into the Christian celebration of Christ's resurrection.

On Easter, the triangle designs on the eggs that had represented air, fire and water became the symbols for the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Baskets of Ukrainian Easter eggs adorn tables at the Stiver home, and individual pysanky are displayed on the mantle in the living room.

Now 80, Stiver hasn't decided what is the best thing to do with his collections. He recently gave a few large crosses to Lenoir-Rhyne College. "I'm reaching the age where I'm downsizing," he said. "I thought they would look good in classrooms at L-R, so I gave them some."

He has about 100 crosses on display at Claremont City Hall. Stiver lived in Claremont from 1951 to 1990, where he was pastor at St. Mark's Lutheran Church. City Hall would like to keep part of his cross collection, Stiver said.

While he's thinking about downsizing, Stiver is still acquiring religious icons. His 50-year-old son, David, regularly sends him crosses, as well as pysanky. When Stiver was undergoing heart bypass surgery two years ago, David Stiver came from California to be with his father.

During that time, the younger

Stiver became interested for the first time in his father's crosses. He took pictures of the collection, then went to seminaries to read about the history of each cross and is now writing a book with

photographs of his father's cross collection.

Stiver said of his son, "If it's been my passion to collect crosses, it's been his to write about them."