

## **Crafter gives recycling stylish twist**

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Anita Adame has been a checker at the Rancho Cucamonga Food 4 Less for years. She's seen people with all kinds of wallets, purses, clutches and totes, from dime-store knock-offs to designer labels.

However, when regular customer Barbara Dolge of Phelan came through her line with an unusual, expensive-looking bag, Adame had to know where she got it.

"It looked like a soft wicker basket, maybe bamboo," said Adame, of Fontana. "I couldn't believe it when she told me she made it from plastic grocery bags."

Even after close examination, it's difficult to tell that the mystery material is something seen every day and given away for free.

"Everybody's so big on going green. She's found a great way to recycle," Adame said. "The bags are very strong and hold a lot. It's definitely something you could take to the beach. I told her she should sell them."

Dolge, pronounced dole-G, had never thought about selling her bags.

She just makes them as a hobby, she said. However, she's had a number of inquires and is now giving the idea some consideration.

"I don't even know what I'd charge," Dolge said. "It wasn't even my idea."

(Anyone interested in a bag can call Dolge and work out the details.)

Dolge explained that about two years ago, while taking a class in medical terminology, one of the girls in the class came in with such a bag and challenged her classmates: "You can't touch it, but can you guess what it's made out of?"

"I was shocked when I found out, and I wanted to make one," said Dolge, a crafter who quickly figured out the pattern.

It takes about 90 bags, cut up and crocheted together to make one "super" bag. She makes them in various colors depending on where she shops.

Dolge lays the bags flat and cuts off the top handles and the bottom fold. She then cuts the bag in one long strip, like someone peeling the skin from an apple.

Dolge is a married mother of two teenage girls - Ashley, 18, and Nicole, 16, whom she's taught to crochet. She works two jobs in Rancho Cucamonga and does her crocheting on the side.

"When I'm out of bags, I tell my girls, `Let's go shopping,'" she said.

Making the grocery bag totes isn't the first esoteric endeavor Dolge has explored. About 10 years ago, she started repairing cane chairs. Cane chairs are made from such materials as palms, grasses, bamboo and rattan, woven into mesh to make up the seat and back of the chair.

Dolge became good at the craft and started Barbara's Secrets, a part-time business of repairing the chairs.

Dolge's heard the rumors that stores might ban plastic bags to help the environment, but that doesn't concern her.

"I'd be OK with it," she said. "I'm a big recycler and for all of us taking responsibility for the environment. If they ban the bags, I'll bring in my own and find something else to make."