

# Rugs Weave New Lives

Scholar-in-Residence

In 1978, German chemist Dr. Harald Boehmer sparked “The Great Anatolian Rug Revolution,” transforming the entire Turkish rug

industry. Even more than an industrial revolution, it has become a cultural survival project known as DOBAG, a Turkish acronym for Natural Dye Research and Development Project, which has restored the ancient art of handwoven carpets and established the first-ever woman’s rug weaving cooperative in the Islamic world.

Boehmer will give a lecture, *Nomads of Anatolia*, at 7 p.m., Saturday, Sept. 13, in Hudson Auditorium, Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art. The lecture is free and open to the public as part of JCCC’s Scholar-in-Residence program. A reception with Boehmer begins at 6 p.m. During his Sept. 13-17 residency, Boehmer will also address JCCC textile classes.

Boehmer’s passion for native rugs began when he was teaching in Turkey. Using thin-layer chromatography, the chemist was able to analyze the dyes used in old Turkish rugs and match the vibrant colors to their original plant sources.

Under Boehmer’s guidance, weavers stopped buying petroleum-based dyes and returned to the natural plant dyes for their wool. The profit-sharing cooperative DOBAG began and now supports about 400 families in western Turkey.

According to Jan Cummings, JCCC interior design professor, Boehmer had three goals for the DOBAG project.

- Upgrading the weaving industry and creating the finest carpets in Turkey today
- Halting migration to urban centers by establishing a strong economic base within Turkish villages
- Invigorating the arts and crafts tradition of the Turkish people, thus creating a source of national pride for the future.

“Dr. Boehmer has successfully achieved his goals and continues his work in Turkey today,” Cummings said.



Indeed, the DOBAG Project has raised the social and economic status of women. Villagers are no longer forced to move to cities to look for work. A participating weaver must send her children to school, and no child labor is allowed.

DOBAG rugs are famous worldwide because of their quality wool that is hand-carded and hand-spun, beautiful colors, traditional Turkish designs and number of knots per inch. Information with the weaver’s name and village is attached to each rug and kept on file at the University of Marmara, Istanbul, which oversees the project.

Copies of Boehmer’s most recent book *Nomads in Anatolia: Encounters with a Vanishing Culture* with contributions from Josephine Powell and Dr. Serife Atlihan will be for sale on Sept. 13.

JCCC’s Scholar-in-Residence program is designed to bring visiting scholars to students, faculty and the public. For more information about Boehmer’s residency, contact Cummings at 913-469-8500, ext. 3941, or send e-mail to [janc@jccc.edu](mailto:janc@jccc.edu). 🌿

Anatolian rugs are displayed here, photographed by Boehmer in 2007.