

Stitching Sisters



Chetek quilters form a tight-knit group

by Ruth Erickson, Chronotype staff

The guild was founded by Chetek resident Rita Hong and former Chetek resident Lisa Ruehlow.

The Stitching Sisters Quilt Guild, a group of Chetek area quilters that meets twice a month year-round, are not counting the stitches but the friendships made as they begin their third year.

The 43-member guild includes quilters from Cameron, Barron, Hillsdale, Dallas and New Auburn in addition to Chetek.

It normally meets on the first and third Mondays of each month. When holidays conflict, such as the Monday after New Year's Day this year, the guild is bumped to the second and fourth Mondays.

For 9 months of the year, September to May, the guild meets at the Covenant Retreat Center at Luther Park Bible Camp in Chetek. During the 3 summer months when the camp is in session, June-August, the guild meets at one of the churches in Chetek.

The guild's next gathering, which includes an election of officers, is Monday, Jan. 23 at the retreat center.

In lieu of rent for meeting at the retreat center, the guild donates one quilt a year to Luther Park's annual Quilt and Antique Auction each August.

PATTERNED AFTER ANOTHER GUILD

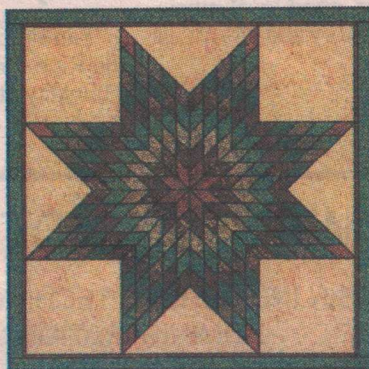
Hong explained how the guild came about and how it has already far exceeded her expectations.

She recalled that Ruehlow and she had attended a quilt camp put on by Ginny Dubeck and her daughter, Linda, in Solon Springs at which they had met many women from their quilting group, the Ladies of the Lake Quilt Guild.

"It was inspiring to meet such a wonderful group of women, who not only were excellent quilters, but also active in their communities, careers and home," related Hong. "On the way home, Lisa and I talked about how great it would be if we could have such a group around the Chetek area, and thus Stitching Sisters was born."

Ruehlow, who worked at Luther Park, made arrangements for a meeting place and Hong sent out notices that a guild was forming.

The co-founder continued, "I was very surprised at how many showed



Sew and Tell

Above, Members of the Stitching Sisters Quilt Guild re-enact a typical Sew and Tell that is featured at the guild's second meeting of each month. Holding a quilt are Linda Huber, at left, and Merry Soyck-Doring. Seated from left, Mary Bina shares highlights about the quilt she made while Jane Martin and Diana Thompson listen and ask questions.

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up the first night. I thought it would just be Lisa and myself!"

Astoundingly, about 30 quilters of all ages and skill levels and from throughout the area showed up on that evening in January.

One of the first orders of business was establishing a name. Several suggestions were given with Stitching Sisters winning the vote despite most of the members not knowing each other. Still they felt bonded by a love of quilting.

Few, if any, had participated in a quilting group, so they took Dubeck's advice on how the guild might wish to function, patterned after her quilting guild.

The purpose statement they came up with states: "The purpose of our guild is to preserve and encourage the art of quilting and to promote a gathering of people with this common interest."

Once they realized that one of those in attendance, Jane Martin of Chetek, had run a quilt shop in Sun Prairie for 25 years and was willing to pass on some of her knowledge, they added: "Instruction and education are provided in the design and techniques of quilt making."

Also established was the meeting time and place, the election of officers and dues.

The meeting room at the Covenant Center is open on guild days from 1-9 p.m. and quilters are welcome to arrive with projects to work on whenever it is convenient for them. A teaching demonstration is offered by Martin at 3:30 p.m. on the first Monday of the month, while Sew and Tell is featured on the third Monday of the month. A light meal is served at 4:30 p.m., followed by a 5:30 p.m. business meeting. Afterwards quilters can linger as long as they like—quilting, socializing or both.

Martin said the lessons she presents are designed to improve skill at any level and feature topics such as color awareness, layouts, special techniques, hand vs. machine quilting, and ways to think outside the box.

Sew and Tell, like the tradi-

tional show and tell, encourages guild members to bring in quilted items—from newly completed projects to items handed down the generations—and share something about them.

Members sign up and take turns providing the light meals, which typically feature soups or casseroles in the winter and salads in the summer.

A birthday club that was included in the first meeting of the month is being discontinued.

Officers elected for the first year were Jane Martin and Billie Linkletter, co-presidents; Linda Huber, vice president; Deanna Lear McGinnis, secretary/treasurer; and Rhonda Candler, sunshine.

At the start of the second year,

the board structure was changed slightly with Martin as president, Huber as vice president, Lear McGinnis as secretary, Donna Matus as treasurer, and Mary Bina, Diana Thompson and Julie Miller as members at large.

Elections are coming up again this month for the guild's third year, which officially begins in February. The board meets four times a year to plan the calendar.

Dues are \$15 a year and are to be paid by the end of February.

STITCHING TOGETHER FRIENDSHIPS

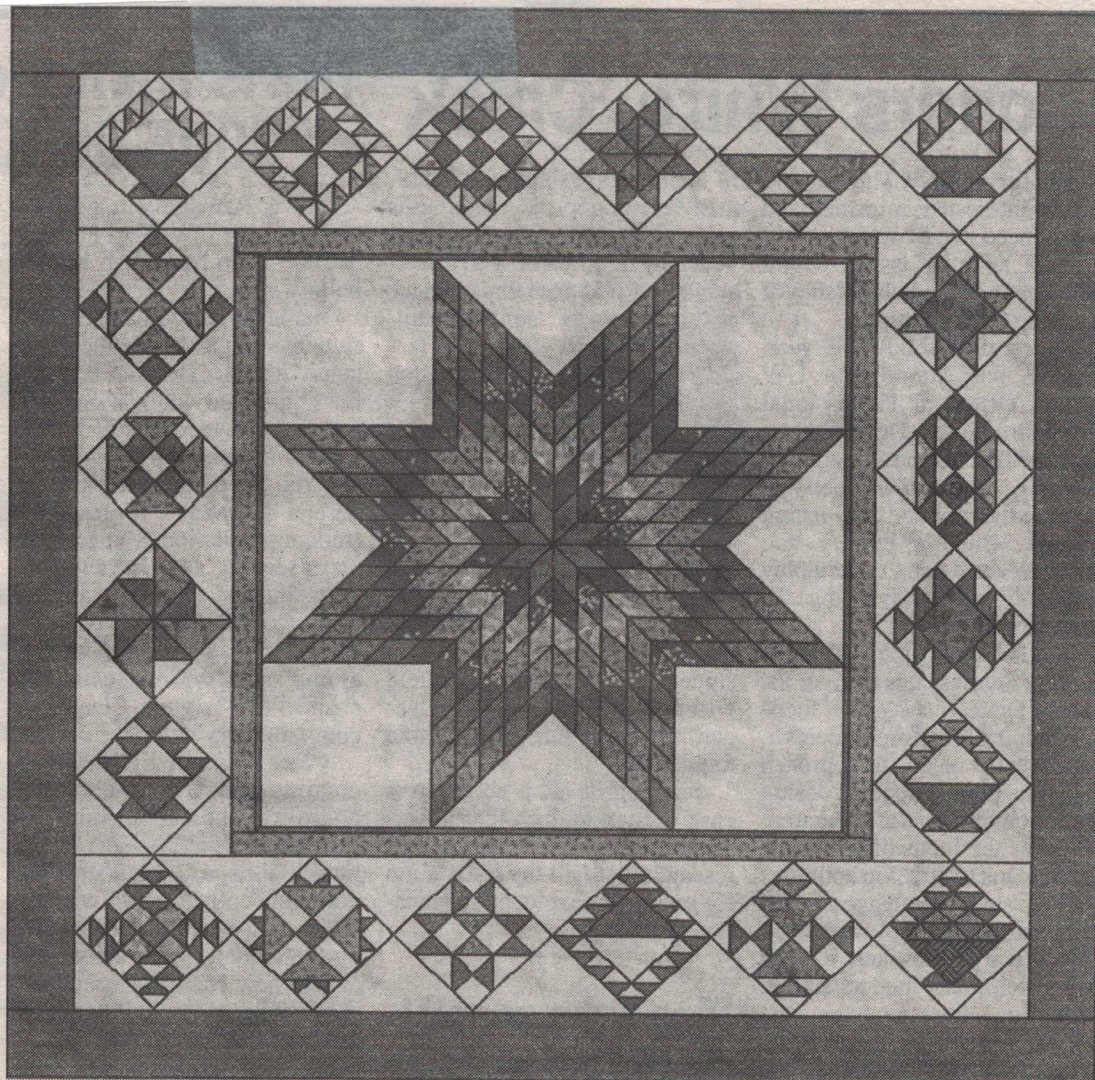
Quilters say that "friendships are sewn one stitch at a time," and that has been the case with the guild.

"We're a compatible bunch," said Bina, a biological sister to the guild president. "We do enough variety that nobody wants

to miss it."

Thompson, who grew up in Chetek, said what amazes her is that the guild has brought together so many local women who never knew each other.

Merry Soyck-Doring said a common thread among those who showed up for the first meeting was that each of them talked about having unfinished



This is the pattern of the quilt to be raffled off at guild's first quilt show



projects. Hopefully inspiration received from guild meetings has motivated many of them to complete what they had started.

"We've had good attendance in the summer too," said Martin, who didn't expect that.

Soyck-Doring said she didn't attend guild meetings during its first summer and now regrets it. "I just felt like I was really missing out on something," said the quilter who now attends year-round.

Thompson explained, "We have the kind of group you don't want to miss. We've all learned a lot."

"You learn something at every meeting," agreed Huber.

Soyck-Doring remarked that the instruction has been "an extra bonus." She envisioned the guild as a place for quilters to get together to sew and chat, but the Stitching Sisters is much more than that.

Toni Weise commented, "I belong to a church quilting group in La Crosse but joining the 'Sisters' is so much more educational. We have a good leader and president who is very talented in her field of quilting and is willing to share her talents with us. She is always having instructions on one phase of quilting, be it types of batting, sashing, binding, cutting, choice of fabric, etc."

She added, "I am only a 6-month resident of the Chetek area, and it is very hard for me to miss our guild meetings. It is good to know if I have a question or problem, all I have to do is ask a 'sister.' Most groups you just bring projects you are working on, and there isn't the help if you need it. Stitching Sisters work on some projects together, and we are encouraged to expand on our own."

Quilters ...

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COMMUNITY CAUSES, BUS TRIPS

In the short time since the forming of the guild, it has contributed to many community causes and still finds time for a yearly bus trip.

"Quilting is sharing yourself with others," is not only a motto in the guild's scrapbook but a fitting description of their efforts.

"One of the goals of the guild is to give back to the community," said Martin, and her group of creative quilters has found creative ways to do that.

Among causes the guild has contributed to are the following:

- It made and donated quilts as housewarming gifts to the mother and son who are occupying the Habitat for Humanity home in Chetek.

- It made a quilt for the Chetek VFW Auxiliary, which the veterans group raffled off for \$1,500.

- It has made about 30 baby quilts a year for the past 2 years for the neonatal intensive care unit at St. Joseph's Hospital in

Marshfield. Thompson said that project began after the group was informed of the need for them. "It's a nice, simple thing quilters can do," she said.

- For the first time this year, the guild contributed pattern packages, a table runner, a Christmas tree skirt, a throw and a quilt to the third annual David Busta Basketball Tournament and Silent Auction in Chetek on the weekend after Thanksgiving.

Altogether the benefit raised \$32,000, all of which has been designated for the David Busta Spinal Cord Injury Research Fund at UW-Madison's Waisman Center. Patterns for the Packer Paws quilt the guild donated to the benefit are still for sale at \$5 each with all proceeds given to that cause. Busta is a young man from Chetek who suffered a spinal cord injury in a fall 2 years ago.

In addition to working on projects for community causes, the guild has taken two bus trips to Duluth and has never had trouble filling the bus.

In September 2004, the guild attended the quilt show Quilting

on the Waterfront: Machines in Motion. In June 2005, they attended a quilt show put on by the Minnesota Quilters, which featured vendors from across the country.

UPCOMING SHOW

One of the group's ongoing projects has been the Block of the Month, in which members have been encouraged to purchase a kit that includes all supplies needed to make a particular block. At each meeting, a block is due and a new block is demonstrated.

In conjunction with the 20-block project, guild members were asked to bring in recipes arranged in 20 categories that were compiled into the Stitching Sisters Recipe Sampler, a cookbook resembling quilting blocks.

Each of the 20 blocks the guild has learned to do is now being incorporated into the border of a Cookbook Sampler quilt to be raffled off this summer. The queen-size quilt features Thimbleberry fabric in rich earth tones.

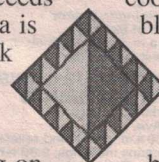
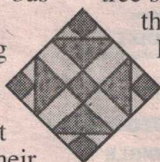
Both copies of the cookbook and raffle tickets for the quilt will be for sale at the guild's first quilt show, which is tentatively set for the first weekend in July at the Chetek Community Center.

Guild members decided to do a quilt show to showcase the work involved in their yearlong project, along with other projects and activities that the guild has undertaken in the past 2 years. Watch for further details on that event as the date approaches.

SEW MANY IDEAS

The guild president cannot believe that 2 years have already passed and the guild hasn't yet had a quilting bee.

Martin said another upcoming





Sampler project

Guild member Diana Thompson shows some of the quilt patterns that are replicated in a Cookbook Sampler featuring many of the guild's favorite recipes that have been tried and tested at their guild meetings. Copies of the "Sampler Cookbook" will be for sale at their show this summer.

project will be the making of a signature quilt with some type of pattern to be used as the Stitching Sisters' logo. She thinks the quilt pattern called Sister's Choice would make an appropriate signature pattern but said that will be something for the new board to decide.

Guild members are also encouraged to add their own block to a Christmas quilt, with the block pattern and instructions included in the Christmas card that guild members received this past Christmas.

With "sew" many ideas piling up, the expanding guild is humming with activity.

Any other quilters who would like to join this active guild are invited to call board members Mary Bina at 458-4206 or Julie Miller at 837-1345 for a membership packet or further details.

"It is amazing how much talent is in this area," remarked Hong. "The quilt guild is even more than I envisioned it. I love that we are able to contribute to our community and educate ourselves along the way."

She added, "I knew when I started the guild, I wouldn't be super-involved. Between the golf course and my job at the school, and family and music commitments, I knew I wouldn't have a lot of time. I wanted the guild to be an organization that you come to when you can and do what you can and not another organization that I need to feel guilty about when I couldn't make it. I think that is why the guild is so fun—everyone does what they can and we support each other in whatever we do. I have made many friends and truly think of each and every member as one of my sisters, not only in sewing but in 'the quilt of life.'" □



Quilt donated to Busta benefit

Both biological and guild sisters Mary Bina and Jane Martin show the scrapbook pages and a quilt similar to the one the Stitching Sisters Quilt Guild donated to the third annual David Busta Basketball Tournament and Silent Auction in Chetek on the weekend after Thanksgiving. The guild also donated a table runner, tree skirt, throw and pattern packages to the benefit that raised \$32,000 for the David Busta Spinal Cord Injury Research Fund at UW-Madison's Waisman Center. Busta is a young man from Chetek who suffered a spinal cord injury in a fall 2 years ago. Teammates of the former athlete organized the benefit, which has raised \$77,000 since its start.

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