

Interest in quilting in Marquette County came to the forefront during the Bi-Centennial celebrations of 1976 when some interested people put together a quilt show for the event. Early history is sketchy, and there is not necessarily consensus, but it is recorded that in 1978, several women got together to make a raffle quilt to help defray expenses for an area burn victim. From this base, interest continued to grow and the *Marquette Mining Journal* reports that Marquette County Quilters Association was formed with 6 members in March of 1979. Dues were \$1 per year.

Times change. As of this writing MCQA has 90 members. Dues are \$10 per year. The guild is organized with an elected board of president, vice president for programs, vice president for publicity, secretary, and treasurer, and 11 standing committees – membership, hospitality, blotto, library, web site, raffle, quilt show (which has many sub-committees), charity quilts, newsletter, historian, and Teddy Bear quilts.

MCQA has three important facets, one of which is the bi-annual AUTUMN COMFORTS Quilt Show. The first show was held in 1980 in the Marquette Senior High School. Quilts were not hung, but were draped over tables and other furniture, and works in progress were allowed. One member who participated in the 1980 show thinks there may have been about 50 items in this show. In 1982, there was a hung show in Marquette's Holiday Inn along with a fashion show of quilted garments around the pool. In contrast, we now rent the Great Lakes and Explorers rooms at Northern Michigan University. At the 2002 and 2004 AUTUMN COMFORTS Show we hung 400 and 350 finished quilted items respectively in 11 categories. We had 24 vendors, demos, a silent auction, door prizes, and, of course, the drawing for our raffle quilt. Our next show, which will be similar, will also be held at NMU on November 11 and 12, 2006. We are planning an expanded vendors' area, and will feature our Teddy Bear quilts and a judged section, for members only, called WINTER HOLIDAY. AUTUMN COMFORTS Quilt Show is our major fund raiser.

A second, equally important facet of MCQA is the charity work we do in a variety of on-going projects. One is quilts for Bay Cliff Health Camp. Bay Cliff is a summer resident camp for handicapped children located in Marquette County, and MCQA provides quilts for the campers' beds. The charity quilt committee prepares kits of 80 five inch blocks (finished size), and individuals take kits home and sew together the tops. They are then finished either at a bee or by individuals at home – entirely by machine. Since the younger campers get to take their quilts home at the end of the season, there are replacement quilts that need to be made every year. Older campers leave the quilts at camp, with occasional replacement required. Many of the quilting materials are donated, and we purchase whatever else is needed. Similar quilts are provided for Pregnancy Services and Harbor House – a spouse abuse shelter.

MCQA also provides two types of baby quilts for the two hospitals in the county. There are quilts for infants in Neo-natal Intensive Care, and also Angel Quilts. Angel quilts, in pinks or blues with an angel on them, are provided to families of stillborn infants, or infants who die shortly after birth. The family can use the quilt for burial or as a keepsake.

During 2005 and 2006 we provided a total of 200 quilts to the above mentioned agencies.

Teddy Bear quilts are another of MCQA charity projects. The guild buys 12" teddy bears and members provide quilts between 18" and 24" square for each bear. Teddy Bear quilts are whatever an MCQA member wishes to make as long as it fits the size requirement. Sometimes orphan blocks or practice blocks are finished off as little quilts. Or, perhaps someone creatively puts together leftover pieces, practices machine quilting on it and binds it off. However it is done, the result is a Teddy Bear quilt to help make some child happy. Many of the bears are also lucky enough to receive a homemade sweater or vest, too. At Christmastime, each bear is wrapped in a little quilt, packaged in clear wrap and distributed to organizations in Marquette County which provide Christmas baskets to needy families. During the 2004 and 2005 Christmas seasons we provided a total of 221 bears and quilts.

The third facet of MCQA is quilting education. Besides the monthly programs at meetings, we hold 2 or more mini-workshops each year where members can get together and practice or learn a new technique in quilting. Much of the time, we draw on our own members to provide the teachers for these events. During the year we do not have a quilt show, we offer a weekend retreat with teacher(s) brought in for the event. In 2005, for example, we had a weekend workshop with Katie Pasquini as well as the weekend retreat.

In addition to guild-organized workshops, MCQA has many Friendship Groups. These groups are composed of small groups of members who want more quilting companionship, support, and/or challenge than a monthly meeting provides. These groups are completely independent from MCQA and meet as their schedules allow, usually more frequently than the monthly meeting. Friendship Groups operate independently from MCQA, but the members often bring their projects to the regular meetings and share them with the rest of the guild.

This year MCQA will hold our third annual advertised quilt sale on November 4 as a service to its members. At this time any member can set up a table to sell their work to members of the community.

From time to time, we also do one-of-a-kind projects, depending on what the occasion demands. In 2002, MCQA published a cookbook, *Quilters' Cuisine*.

Our meetings are conducted in the same format for 10 months during the year. Before the meeting, a refreshment table is set up. The guild librarians set up shop and lay out about 150 guild-owned books which are available for member check-out. There is also a raffle table, stocked by member-donations, available for perusal. Raffle tickets are \$1 each, and the drawing for these treasures is held during the refreshment break.

We have an actual business meeting – hopefully short, a drawing for the blotto blocks made from a pattern distributed at the previous meeting, and an informative program on some aspect of quilting. Finally, it is time for the best part of the evening - the time of inspiration and challenge – SHOW ‘N TELL. Members with finished projects show them on stage to the appreciative “oohs”, “ahhs” and applause from the audience. Pictures are taken of each project and these moments of glory are forever recorded.

That is the format for 10 months - July is different, as is December. Christmas-in-July is a workshop instead of a meeting. We bring finger food and our machines and tackle whatever it is the Christmas-in-July committee has planned for us, and..... have SHOW ‘N TELL. In December, members fill the serving tables with delicious food and we enjoy the meal around beautifully decorated tables. The program is recognition for those who have served during the year, and, of course, SHOW ‘N TELL!

In 2004 the Marquette County Quilters Association took a giant leap and established a website www.marquettequilters.com . Along with this a digital camera was purchased in order to publish SHOW ‘N TELL photos and other events. Please visit our website and see our monthly newsletter, our photos, our projects, read about our November quilt show, or contact us.

OR

Come in person if you are ever in the Marquette area on the first Wednesday of any month. Meeting time is 6:30 p.m. (except in July and December when the time is 6 p.m.) in Peter White Public Library’s Community Room on the lower level. We’d love to see you.