

Quilting for a Cause

Quilters always have supported causes through the special language of their art. In the late 19th century, they helped pay for churches. "Drunkard's Path" quilt sales financed the efforts of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. And quilting bee revenues aided both sides during the Civil War. Today, quilters still pick up needles and thread and stitch their help for causes.

Needy Babies Receive ABC Quilts

Ellen Ahlgren, 72, of Northwood, N.H., wanted to bring comfort to at-risk babies (those who are born with AIDS or addicted to drugs or who are abandoned at birth). It broke her heart that many of these children never know love.

So she organized a massive grassroots group to form ABC Quilts—At-Risk Babies Crib Quilts. Ahlgren's group has given thousands of quilts to needy babies.

Homemakers, senior citizens, and members of church groups, class-

rooms, and Girl Scout and Boy Scout troops are some of the caring people who quilt for Ahlgren's project.

Babies get AIDS or become addicted to drugs or are abandoned through no fault of their own, notes Ahlgren.

"They are children first, who love to be cuddled and to wrap up in their own little quilt," she says.

Ahlgren also gives out copies of fact sheets about AIDS and drug abuse to her quilters to help educate people. If you're interested in helping, write to Ellen Ahlgren, ABC Quilts, Northwood, NH 03261.

Church Pieced Together by Quilters

A few years ago, the Bethel Springs United Pentecostal Church in West Tennessee was bursting at the seams. Membership had increased from 30 to more than 100, and a larger church was needed.

In the 1960's, members of the church's Busy Bee Quilting Club used their sewing skills to help raise money for the present building. They

charged \$3 to quilt tops for people.

But they wondered how much of a dent quilting would make because of today's construction prices. Members began taking orders, charging an average of \$200 per quilt. Three years later, the ladies can proudly say their handiwork has generated more than \$40,000 for a new church, now nearing completion.

At 96, Lena Barnes is the oldest member of the club. "I won't be here too long to enjoy [the new church], I guess," says Barnes. "But we're making this church for my grandchildren and my great-grandchildren and my great-great-grandchildren."

Making quilts gives elderly church members a chance to contribute when, perhaps, they can't afford to in other ways, says 73-year-old quilter Deloris Johnson.

HOPE Stronger Because of This Quilter

It's the town school in Houlika, Miss., that benefits from the skills of Juanita Chrestman.

The students and parents behind



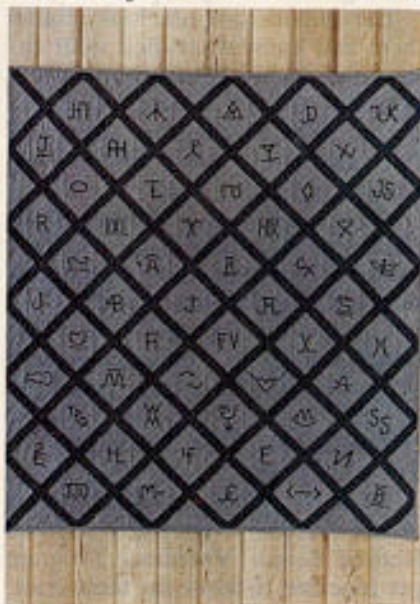
(Above) Juanita Chrestman (seated at table with quilt) loves to make her annual quilt contribution for the school in Houlika, Miss. Photo: Yarn Cleveland
(Right) The Busy Bee Quilters say every stitch of their work represents an opportunity to add one more person to the membership of their church in Bethel Springs, Tenn. Photo: Mary Ellen Glasco





(Left) Ellen Ahlgren became unofficial grandmother to thousands of needy babies when she founded ABC Quilts. Photo: Ira Wyman

(Below) Work shirt blue denim was used for the background, and blue jean denim was used for the 55 brands on the Bandera Brands quilt. Photo: Hull Youngblood



the Houlika Organization for Pupil Education (HOPE) all know Juanita Chrestman.

At 76, she remains one of the biggest supporters of the school that has been or is attended by her 8 children and many of her 15 grandchildren. Her great-grandson now is in the first grade there.

For the past five years, Chrestman has spent hours making a quilt each year to be raffled at the school's annual fundraising field day.

"[Quilting] is the only way that I have money to donate to the school," Chrestman explains. She clears \$500 for the cause each year.

As for how long she plans to make quilts for the school, she says, "Til my hands tell me not to."

Brands Quilt Benefits Senior Citizens

Carolee Youngblood of Bandera, Tex., was impressed with the Silver Sage Bandera Senior Citizens Center. In addition to serving as a gathering spot for Youngblood's quilting group, the center offered classes in weaving, Spanish, and exercise.

"There are a lot of elderly people

around here who live on a fixed income. So the senior citizens center really does contribute a lot to their lives," says Youngblood.

With help from the center's quilters, Carolee, 64, and her needlework group, decided to raise money for the donation-dependent center by making and raffling a quilt.

The quilters took one look around them and knew what their quilt design had to be. "Bandera is still a Western town," Youngblood explains. "The people wear boots and ride horses—it's not play cowboys, you know.

"So we asked area ranchers if we could use their brands for a quilt," she says. The ranchers gave permission and chipped in \$10 each.

The quilters managed to capture some of Bandera's Western authenticity—and \$2,000 in raffle proceeds.

Helping Families Through Tough Times

When the quilting group members of the Greene County Commission Retired Senior Volunteer Program get together to work on their craft, they talk about their common neighborhoods, churches—and hard times. The members of the group from Boligee, Ala., haven't much money. But that hasn't stopped them from giving. Several area families who lost everything to fire received handmade quilts from the group as a result of this quilting fellowship.

Families in unfortunate circumstances also motivated Pat Stevens and her quilting guild in Crosby, Tex.



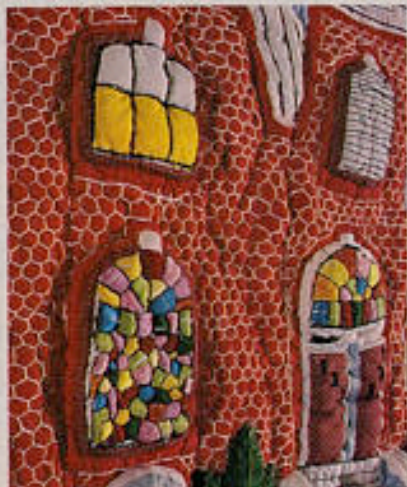
(Above) The Crosby, Tex., quilting guild had home in mind when they made the barnyard quilt for the Ronald McDonald House in Galveston. Photo: Frederica Georgia
(Right) The R.S.V.P. quilting group in Boligee, Ala., has made several quilts for bereft families. Photo: Nancy Dorman-Hickson

A Quilter's Tribute to Civil Rights

Nora Ezell wasn't exactly an activist during the 1960's civil rights movement. "I didn't do too much demonstrations," says the quilter from Eutaw, Ala. "I prayed mightily, and I do believe in prayer." Ezell also uses the language of quilting to speak her heart's thoughts.

One of her storytelling quilts depicts a praying Martin Luther King, the bombed Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, the Brown Chapel AME Church in Selma, and the Bethel Baptist Church in Montgomery. "Stained glass" windows were made with elaborate satin-stitch embroidery, and a facade of "brick" was created with small stitches in white silk over red fabric.

This year's winner of the Alabama Folklife Heritage Award, Ezell says she can't teach others how to make the mosaic mixture.



Nora Ezell's tribute quilt took over 500 hours to make. Such devotion illustrates Ezell's deep commitment to her cause. Photo: Art Meripol

"I do it off the top of my head. I can't teach you something that I don't know myself, can I? Because these quilts just come."

Members wanted to show concern for sick children's families who were staying at the Ronald McDonald House in Galveston.

So they made the *Progressive Farmer* barnyard animals quilt and gave it to the facility. Now, the families enjoy a little touch of home while their children are being treated in nearby hospitals.

To comfort a needy baby. To build a church. To educate a child. To add

zest to senior citizens' lives. To benefit troubled families. These quilters may be working for different causes, but their quilts are pieced together with the common threads of love.

By NANCY DORMAN-HICKSON

Editor's Note.—If you know of a quilt made for a cause, we'd like to hear about it. Send photographs and information to Quilt Causes Editor, *Progressive Farmer*, Box 2581, Birmingham, AL 35202. Photographs cannot be returned.

