

Kittitas County joins national barn quilt movement

This summer Washington became the 34th state in the country to join a nationwide agri-tourism movement when Kittitas County launched a new project called Barn Quilts of Kittitas County.

With the introduction of BQKC, Washington state joins a movement that began in Ohio eleven years ago when Donna Sue Groves decided to honor her mother by painting a large quilt block on the side of the family barn. Since then barn quilts have spread beyond Ohio to 33 other states. At last count over 4,000 barns and historic buildings are decorated with the blocks. The painted-wood quilt blocks typically measure 4x4 or 8x8. They may be mounted on a barn, or on posts near a barn or historic building.

In recognition of this area's extensive agricultural heritage, the Kittitas County project brings together local barn owners, artists, businesses and community groups to decorate the area's barns and historic buildings with quilt block patterns chosen for their historic or cultural significance.

"This is an opportunity to highlight specific aspects of our county and state's agricultural history," said BQKC Board President, Jacky Fausset. "Or a family might choose a block to honor an ancestor, or their involvement in a particular part of agriculture like growing hay, wheat, raising horses or running a dairy."

Self-guided, driving tour trail maps connect the decorated rural barns to urban and historic areas providing the thread that strings dissimilar attractions together according to Lindy Turner of the Appalachian Quilt Trail in Tennessee. In Kittitas County, long-term plans call for driving loops to intersect with area towns incorporating 'Walk the Block' tours of downtown historic districts.

On Oct. 3, BQKC painted their first quilt block. It has been installed on the gable end of the barn at Dominion Farm owned by Dustin and Sharon Brunson, currently the location of Dusty's Nursery. Fausset said BQKC already has other barn owners ready to join the movement. Curtis and Lucy Bull have already painted their own Barn Quilts and mounted them on each end of their families' historic barn. Darlene Grant, owner of the Yakima River RV Park, is currently in process of painting their Barn Quilt. An avid quilter, Darlene designed the Barn Quilt herself, carefully choosing each color. Her husband Randy is lending his carpentry skills to the framing and installation.

Barns officially designated as historic buildings, because of that designation may not be an appropriate candidate for a quilt block installation on the building. But there's nothing that says they can't have a post-mounted block near the barn according to Fausset. Add those installations to the estimated 400 to 500 old and new barns spread throughout the county, and it's easy to understand why Kittitas County is the ideal epicenter for Washington state's barn quilt movement Fausset added.

"Barn owners are asking us for a barn quilt to symbolize the pride they have in their farms or to honor the history of their family," she said.

Groups that own historic buildings have indicated their interest in the project, too. First in line to participate in the historic building portion of the project are the Carpenter House Museum in Cle Elum, and the Kittitas County Historical Museum in Ellensburg.

Community organizations supporting the project include WSU's Kittitas County Extension Office and the Kittitas County Historic Museum. A new partnership between BQKC and the Kittitas County Chamber is providing both fiscal sponsorship of the project's 501(c)3 status and the supportive push to launch the effort.

"With the help of our community sponsors and volunteers we hope to have 30 to 40 quilts painted and installed this fall and winter," said Fausset. "Our plan is to hold a formal dedication of Kittitas County Barn Quilt Trail in the spring of 2013 in conjunction with a quilt show featuring Kittitas County quilters.

For more information about BQKC call Amy McGuffin, Director of Tourism, Kittitas County Chamber of Commerce 509-925-2002 or Jacky Fausset, 509-312-9185. Visit the project's new website at www.barnquilts.washington.org. You can also contact Barn Quilts of Kittitas County, PO Box 861, Cle Elum, WA 98922.