

QUILT COUNTRY

QUILTING HAS A SPECIAL PLACE IN THE FABRIC OF American culture, as well as here in the Four Corners. Connie J. Nordstrom, a quilt historian and author of *And She Made Quilts*, says settlers to the region in the late 1800s had “brutally hard” lives, often making quilts from simple things like feed sacks just to keep their families warm.

“But mostly, no matter how impoverished the women were, they were called to make quilts as a way of bringing beauty into lives of arduous toil.”

Nordstrom says quilting expanded after World War I, when new dyes and colors became available for fabrics, such as bright lavenders, lime green and tangerine. “These colors were true and clear and women loved them.” She says another renaissance happened in 1976 during the Bicentennial because of “a huge explosion of interest in everything American.”

Meanwhile, in Durango and the Four Corners the art and craft of quilting is thriving and expanding. The La Plata County Quilters Guild is celebrating its 30th anniversary and supports a group of 60-some quilters who meet once a month and host a number of charitable and educational events. “There are a lot of talented quilters here, and we’re getting new quilters coming in,” says board member and native Durangoan Barbara Morgan.

Morgan is the reigning Grand Champion quilter at the La Plata County Fair, a title she has held six previous times, along with many other awards. The author of *Children’s Zoo*, a book about baby quilts, she says the key to winning quilting competitions is paying attention to detail, from cutting and piecing the fabric to keeping “a good 1/4-inch seam and taking the time to make it right.”

Every year, the guild hosts the Four Corners Quilt Gathering (April 15-17), which features programs from renowned national quilters. “We encourage people to bring in their quilts – it’s the best show-and-tell,” Morgan says. “Quilting brings people together; they can share something they’ve made from the heart.”

Area quilters also donate quilts to Project Linus, a non-profit that gives handmade blankets to children in need. The guild hosts an annual quilt show in September, which raises money for this especially heartwarming cause.

A drop-off point for Project Linus quilts is the Durango Quilt Company, co-owned by Judy Danielson and Margien Gram. Gram said the two friends have donated about 200 quilts to charitable endeavors and that Project Linus is particularly close to her heart. Danielson says quilters visit fabric stores during vacations, just for fun; and their shop – with more than 5,000 bolts of fabric – is popular with tourists.

While Durango Quilt Company is in its 28th year, a new store, Stitch Quilt and Sewing Boutique, opened in 2014. Owner LeeAnn Vallejos says, “I really wanted to spotlight art quilting and modern, contemporary looks. I love color, so I highlight bright and bold.”

Vallejos says that modern quilting explores color and technique, and can be asymmetrical. It can also feature “deep” quilting, with lots of extra filling. Often, modern quilts are art pieces meant to be mounted to a canvas. Her art-quilting classes fill quickly.

Vallejos, who started quilting in 2000, belongs to the La Plata Quilters Guild, as well as to a smaller group of quilters called a “hive.” “I’m probably the youngest, and I’m 45. The oldest is now 78. We have a terrific quilting community here in Durango,” she says, adding there are strong communities in other Four Corners towns, including Pagosa Springs and Farmington.

Bayfield resident Pat Akers comes from generations of quilters. She organizes quilt donations for Colorado’s annual Gold Star Mothers retreat, a free event put on by Blue Star Moms for military families who have lost loved ones. “It’s very rewarding to see [these families] receiving quilts,” Akers says. “They so appreciate that someone remembers their child.”

Akers sums it up: “Quilting is a craft that has evolved beyond just necessity for warmth – it’s now for creativity,” she says. “Women always create – that’s just how we are. From creating babies to crafts, to quilts, I think it’s part of our genes.” ■

Award-winning journalist Jen Reeder owns many stunning quilts made by her mother Sally Reeder, an award-winning quilter.



Above: Bargello Leaf, Barbara Morgan

Opposite Page

Top left: Within and Without, Jenny Treanor

Top right: Pennsylvania Tulip Pots, circa 1880

Bottom left: Mealt Falls at Kilt Rock, Maryanne LeBlanc

Bottom right: Pythagoras' Lute, Barbara Morgan

Grisham



Mackey



Nordstrom



Mackey

