



QUILTED *with* LOVE

The Contented Heart Quilt Guild provides invaluable community service

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In 1989, a small assembly of ladies in Wayne County frequently talked about forming a quilt group. Two of them, Alicia Stokes and Ruby McFarland, spoke with Georgia Burton, the county Extension agent, who ended up being a tremendous help in starting a guild and organizing a quilt show. Word went out into the community to gauge interest, and more than 40 ladies showed up at a meeting to discuss the guild.

At that first meeting, the women outlined the goals they wanted to accomplish through their work together. They decided to teach quilting, make a quilt each year, sell raffle tickets on the quilt, and use the money to support a community need. They also wanted to produce a Class A quilt show.

A second meeting was held to officially establish the guild, and the 22 women attending paid a \$6 membership fee. With other obligations that day, Stokes wasn't able to attend that particular meeting, and so—as often happens—she was appointed guild president. A public contest determined name of the guild, with the winning submission being Contented Heart Quilt Guild. The name was submitted by a lady in her 90s who, when asked why she continued to quilt, responded that it gave her a contented heart.

With an enthusiastic beginning, the guild got busy. Members met in the basement of the Wayne County Public Library, made quilts and raffled tickets to raise money. The first-year quilt was sold to provide wood for fuel for a needy

family, and the next year bought coal for another family. By the third year, Wal-Mart had started a program in which needy families could place the name and age of a child on a star, along with what the child needed. Shoppers then could use these stars to purchase items for the kids. The Contented Heart members made a quilt, raffled it for \$300, and sent a delegate to Wal-Mart to buy items for the children whose names were on the stars.

The guild always took a summer trip to a fabric store in another community and to enjoy a picnic together.

In 1993, the Contented Heart Quilt Guild decided to start a quilt show. As president, Stokes went to the founder of the National Quilt Museum in Paducah for guidance. "Mrs. [Meredith] Schroeder [president of the American Quilter's Society] told me to start with something that is already going on, set the date and don't change it," Stokes said. "She also told us to keep the price affordable, handle the quilts professionally, rope them off, and wear white gloves when handling the quilts.

"We followed her instructions, and as Monticello already hosted a well-attended Labor Day event each year, we decided to coincide with it. We set the date, location [the National Guard Armory] and price, and stuck with it. We sought sponsors and donations from businesses and organizations in town to help us build quilt frames and what we needed was provided. It was a real community effort."

Contented Heart's first show was considered a huge success. The guild displayed 93 quilts and hosted more than 300 people.

"After our third show, the public library where we'd always met was running out of room for us," Stokes said. "And we needed to find a new location to meet. My husband told me about a historic building in downtown Monticello that was for sale. I laughed at him and told him the guild had all of \$240 in our checking account."

But her husband wasn't about to let the building go. He reminded his wife of something they'd heard on the news. It was 1996, an election year, and then-First Lady **Hillary Clinton** had talked about wanting to help women's groups that wanted to help themselves.

"He suggested that I call the White House, ask for Mrs. Clinton and mention that I'm a member of a 30-member guild, and that there is a building for sale downtown we want to buy," Stokes recalled.

She made the call and was put through to **Susan**, Mrs. Clinton's personal assistant. "I explained what we were doing and asked if there was any way we could get a grant so we could purchase the building and have a permanent place to meet. Susan said she'd take it to Mrs. Clinton, and promised to get back to me. Believe it or not, she did, about a week later."

Susan said the first lady was excited about the idea and that her office would research what grants might be available and would be back in touch.

"They called me every week and eventually told me that the best option would be through the Kentucky Appalachian Regional Commission," Stokes said. "The White House offered to call ARC and see if they would write the grant on our behalf.

"While we were waiting, I happened to think about **Hal Rogers** being from our community and thought perhaps he might be able to help. I got hold of his people and explained what we were doing, working with the White House. The staff offered to work on it and get back to me, and I ended up meeting twice with Mr. Rogers, and later with **Mitch McConnell**. I wanted everyone to understand that we had both Democrats and Republicans in our guild, and we wanted help from both sides."

Eventually, the guild worked with the Kentucky Heritage Council and its grant support came through from ARC, enabling the group to purchase the building.

"I called the members and everyone went crazy," Stokes said. "We met over at the building to celebrate. That year, we raised \$60,000 in grants and matching funds. Not bad for this small town and a bunch of little old ladies."

After purchasing the building, the guild decided to rent out portions of it to local artisans to sell their goods on consignment.

In 2004, **Annedda Guffey**, then guild president,

