



Lisa Spalding does free-form stitching on a long-arm quilting machine in her Maumee home. The service helps local quilters finish their projects.



The Quilt Foundry was purchased by (from left) Gretchen Schultz, Mary Beham, Peg Sawyer and Margaret Okuley 20 years ago.

MIRROR PHOTOS BY KAREN BERGER

The Quilt Foundry Celebrates 20 Years Of Sharing Its Art

BY KAREN BERGER
MIRROR REPORTER

Four women parlayed their love of quilting and fabric into a business alliance that has lasted more than 20 years.

Mary Beham, Margaret Okuley, Peg Sawyer and Gretchen Schultz were volunteering and teaching classes with The Quilt Foundry after it opened in 1981. When the owners planned to close the shop during a vacation, the women said, "You can't do that!"

"So the four of us ran the shop for them," Schultz said. In 1987, when the owners decided to sell, the women were already prepared to buy and run the well-loved store.

The Quilt Foundry, in the old Buttergilt factory in uptown Maumee, is bursting with hundreds of shades and patterns of printed cotton fabric plus quilt patterns, notions and instructional videos. Not only has the shop become a haven for local quilters, it also attracts quilters from around the country, especially since placing a listing in *The Quilter's Travel Companion*.

"Our fabric is different from what you'd get at other stores," Schultz said.

The Quilt Foundry only stocks higher-end, closely woven cotton prints. Twenty years ago, fabric manufacturers focused on producing polyester, so finding quality cottons was difficult. That climate made The Quilt Foundry a welcome newcomer in the market for those seeking material. Manufacturers have since responded with an abundance of fabrics in all price ranges, and the shop stocks several lines.

One line, Thimbleberries, is also the name of one of the many clubs that gather at The Quilt Foundry. Using the Thimbleberries line of fabric, members meet monthly to construct a selected quilt, so, by the end of the class, each quilter has

a nearly identical quilt.

The club gathers as much for the socialization as the quilting, Beham said. Other clubs include the Art Quilt Club, Gathering of Quilters and the Quotidians.

While most people begin quilting because of retirement or to make a gift, it quickly becomes a hobby, Schultz said.

"One gal told me, 'OK, I've got all my beds covered. Now what?'" Schultz said. "After they make a few quilts, they're hooked."

The more than 40 classes taught each season often provide the answer. Classes range from beginning quilting, machine and hand appliqué, to seasonal projects such as aprons, bags, purses and landscape art quilts. Even children ages 8 and up can design and sew a quilt during a weeklong class in the summer.

"We promise, no blood and no holes," Schultz laughed.

Revolutionizing the quilting industry has been the mainstreaming of machine quilting, instructional DVDs and online forums for quilters to share ideas.

New products such as a printer-friendly fabric for printing out photos have also added options for quilters.

About 10 years ago, the top prize at a show went to a machine-finished quilt — shocking long-time quilters.

"People said, 'You can't do that!' because they thought the winning entry should be hand-stitched," Okuley said. "But the winner showed how intricate and controlled machine stitching could be — showing that machine stitching is an art."

Among Quilt Foundry regulars is Patsy Thompson, a Holland resident who has produced four instructional DVDs on free-motion machine quilting techniques. A visit to her Web

site at www.patsythompsondesigns.com illustrates how elaborate and beautiful machine quilting can be.

Lisa Spalding, a Maumee resident, credits The Quilt Foundry for starting her part-time business, machine quilting quilts that others have pieced. About 15 years ago, Spalding and a friend couldn't find a local machine quilter to finish her friend's quilt.

"We had to drive to Findlay to find someone," she said. "When I saw it, I said, 'I can do this!'"

So Spalding purchased a used long-arm quilting machine for about \$5,000 and started in business.

The Quilt Foundry allowed her to practice on some of their quilts, she said, and also sends business to her.

"It's more than paid for itself," she said of her first machine.

Because Spalding was one of the first machine quilters in the area, she has quite a following. After her husband Rich retired as a sheet metal worker, he also began more actively pursuing the hobby.

The couple works half-days about five days a week, earning between \$60.00 and 90.00 per quilt and finishing about 100 quilts per year.

While Rich uses patterns,

which he follows with a laser pointer to control the stitching, Lisa's machine allows her to do more free-form stitching. Their basement is filled with the two machines, along with projects for customers, their own designs and two lone ribbons hanging on the wall.

When quilting designers enter their work in a competition, the Spaldings are listed as part of the team. Usually the designer keeps the ribbon, however.

Competitions such as Kaleidoscope of Quilts at Lourdes College are a way for quilters to share ideas and show off their work. Each year, The Quilt Foundry submits a quilt to the Black Swamp Bazaar competition.

"When people start quilting, they're timid. They don't want anyone to criticize them," Schultz said.

"But once they get their first ribbon, they're on their way!" Beham laughed.

Most quilters start because they love to work with fabric, and often stroll along the shelves feeling the material. One woman admitted to coming into The Quilt Foundry before returning home just to relax.

"It's nice to know we're a place of solace," Okuley said.

Meeting people over the

years — and becoming friends with them — is the most satisfying part of the job, hands-down, say all four women. Quilters, they say, are friendly and giving people, often donating quilts to charitable organizations.

"But do we need to have a

reason to quilt?" asked Schultz. "Sometimes quilting is a reason to just sit and be quiet."

The Quilt Foundry is located at 234 W. Wayne St., Maumee. For more information and hours, call (419) 893-5703.

Browning Masonic Brunch Bunch To Kick Off With Dick Anderson

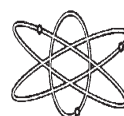
Dick Anderson, chairman of the board of The Andersons, Inc., will be the guest speaker at the kickoff for the third season of the Browning Masonic Community's Brunch Bunch. The event takes place at 9:30 a.m. on Tuesday, January 15.

Anderson's Maumee-based company has annual revenues of approximately \$1.2 billion, and he will speak of The Andersons' past, present and future. The event is open to the public and will include a complimentary light breakfast followed by the program in Harmony Hall on the Browning Masonic Community campus, located at 8883 Browning Dr., Waterville.

The event is limited to 80 people and reservations are required. To make a reservation or for more information, call Sharon Elliott or Carleen Sweet at (419) 878-4055.

Browning Brunch Bunch events will continue at 9:30 a.m. on the third Tuesday of each month.

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