

County's 225th Barn Quilt Celebrates Felts' Golden Wedding Anniversary

When Mary Ellen Felts first talked to Shawano County's barn quilt project coordinator Jim Leuenberger about sponsoring a barn quilt, she said she wanted a pattern to celebrate the 50th wedding anniversary of her and her husband Tom on August 24. "The Double Wedding Ring pattern just seemed to be the right one, even though it was a rather difficult one to lay out," she said. Once the pattern was finalized, Mary Ellen worked with Leuenberger on the color scheme. Then she and Tom helped Leuenberger do the painting.

The quilt, Shawano County's 225th, was put up on August 23, one day before the Felts' 50th anniversary, by LeRoy Raddant and Bruce Teetzen of Raddant Electric in Shawano.

When Tom and Mary Ellen purchased the property at W7675 County A just north of Shawano in 1969, it was known as the "Strauss" farm. The original owner of the property was a Mr. Gill, a lumberman from Wausau. The barn was built, probably around 1920, by a local farmer, Albert Buettner, using peg construction. Frank Strauss bought the farm in the early 1920s. It was then owned by Albert Strauss, who farmed about 180 acres and had a dairy herd. He actually owned several farms in the area.

Tom Felts was brought up in the construction business. His grandfather, C.C. Felts, started by building barns at age 16 in 1893. Later, Tom's dad, Orlin, joined the business. Tom started learning the business at an early age and was working full time by the time he was in the fifth or sixth grade. His brother, Chuck, has also been in the business, and now, Tom and Mary Ellen's son, Chuck, is the fourth generation to work at Felts Construction.

Over the years, the business has concentrated mostly on commercial building, including constructing the Lutheran and Presbyterian churches and many of the structures owned by CRI. "My granddad always liked building churches," Tom said.

The Felts family always liked hunting as well, and in 1998, Tom and Mary Ellen made their first hunting trip to Africa. Since then, Tom has had to add a room onto their house to display his mounted trophies. The most exciting trophy Tom has is that of a world record Wild Himalayan Tahr (a beardless goat) that he shot in New Zealand in June 2012. It was a shot from about 325 meters and was the first Tahr Tom had ever seen. The record was certified by Safari Club International (SCI).

As for their barn quilt, Mary Ellen is a quilter and had thought about getting a barn quilt for some time. Both Tom and Mary Ellen love the way it turned out. And both agree it is a fitting gift the two gave each other for their golden wedding anniversary. "It's just perfect," Mary Ellen said.

Anyone who would like to participate in Shawano County's barn quilt project can contact project coordinator Jim Leuenberger at jamesmleuenberger@yahoo.com or by phone at 715-524-5685. You can also contact Patti Peterson, tourism manager at the Shawano Country Chamber of Commerce at 715-524-2139 or tourism@shawano.com. A link on the Shawano Chamber Web site includes photos and information on every barn quilt on display in Shawano County. Just go to www.shawanocountry.com and click on the barn quilt icon.