

Morning Star is the Pattern for County's 239th Barn Quilt

Shawano County's 239th barn quilt, called Morning Star, is the second to be displayed on Bill Ninman's barn at N3364 State Highway 22, Shawano. It was sponsored by Tom Whitemarsh of Madison, Wisconsin.

Whitemarsh is a longtime friend of Jim and Irene Leuenberger, who started Shawano County's barn quilt project in 2010. He decided to sponsor the barn quilt for his daughter Regina as a way to tie four generations of the Whitemarsh family together. Tom's grandfather, Ray Whitemarsh, was a farmer near Omro while his dad, Fred, worked as an agriculture instructor and also was the Wisconsin State farm supervisor. As the farm supervisor, he was in charge of all the dairy herds, crops, flower and vegetable gardens for all the prisons, juvenile facilities and colonies in the state. "You could say he managed the biggest farm in the state," Whitemarsh said. During his career, Whitemarsh worked at Oscar Mayer in Madison. His daughter, Regina, will be getting her PhD in microbiology from UW-Madison this fall.

Ninman's Century-old farm was homesteaded in 1866 by Bill's great grandfather Friedricke Ninman. It was later sold to Fred's son, August, then to Art and Etta in 1950. The barn was built in 1951. Bill purchased the farm in 1985. Originally a dairy farm with 24 cows, Bill sold the cows in 1992. A majority of the 118 acre farm is rented out, except for about ten acres Bill uses to grow produce.

Bill has enjoyed growing pumpkins since he was a young boy, according to his mother, Etta, who still lives on the farm. Bill has had a produce stand at Qualheim's True Value at 1345 East Green Bay Street in Shawano since 1997.

Whitemarsh said he just loves coming to Shawano to see the barn quilts. "They really are agricultural 'jewels' that bring back the tradition of public art with a new emphasis on where our food comes from," Whitemarsh said. "The barn quilt project also helps build community pride with the farmers who own the barns and for the people who live in the county. Shawano County has the best barn quilt project in the U.S. and I'm just proud to be a small part of it."

The Ninman barn quilt was painted by the Shawano County barn quilt committee and was put on display by LeRoy Raddant and Bruce Teetzen of Raddant Electric in Shawano.

Anyone who would like to participate in Shawano County's barn quilt project can contact project coordinator Jim Leuenberger at 715-524-5685 or jamesmleuenberger@yahoo.com. 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.