

County's 248th Barn Quilt is on Century Old Barn near Eland

Shawano County's 248th barn quilt, called Susie's Choice, has been sponsored by Rich and Susan Onesti. It is on their barn at 7555 Wheeler Avenue, Eland. The barn was built in the early 1900s and served as a dairy barn until the mid-1970s when the cows were sold and the cropland rented to local farmers. The barn suffered a period of disrepair from then until 1995 when Rich and Susan purchased the farm.

One of the farm's early owners was Ernie Grobbert. In the mid-1950s to 1995 it was owned by Butch and Doris Szutkowski, who sold it to Rich and Susan. When Rich and Susan bought it, the farm had several buildings on it, most of which were burned and buried because of their poor condition. The barn, however, was another matter.

"Despite holes in the roof and the floor, a crumbling foundation, doors falling off, and missing side boards, the barn was too regal a structure to let go," Rich said. "The ridge was still perfectly straight, the hand-hewn hemlock beams that are the 'bones' of the barn had suffered no rot, and the wooden pegs that locked the mortise and tenon joints together were rock solid. So it was a building we felt was worth restoring."

Having their own home building business, and with the equipment and expertise to save the barn, they embarked upon what became a seven-year restoration project. "We have no idea how many hours we worked, but it consumed countless evenings and weekend days," Rich said. "We reinforced and rebuilt the concrete foundation, repaired the holes and laid a large section of barn floor," Rich said. "We re-roofed, replaced missing siding boards, built new doors, re-wired, and did all manner of miscellaneous repairs."

After all the structural work was finished, painting the barn completed the project. "We believe our barn will out-last us," Rich said, "and will be enjoyed by our grandchildren for many years in the future."

Rich and Susan first saw barn quilts when they traveled in Iowa. As quilts began to crop up in Shawano County, they came to enjoy looking for them when traveling around the area. "Their uniqueness is interesting and the bright colors are uplifting for the utilitarian barns they adorn," Rich said. "The colors in our quilt were selected to represent the colors of the Massey tractors we enjoy collecting. We think it looks beautiful on our barn and are proud to participate in the barn quilt project in Shawano County!"

The Onesti 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 by email at 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.