

Shawano County's 257th Barn Quilt Has an Autumn Theme

When Mary Kriha decided to surprise her husband, Jim, with a barn quilt for his birthday, the obvious pattern for the quilt needed to be some type of a maple leaf pattern since Jim and Mary own and operate Kriha's Maple Syrup business at W18586 County Road Z, Birnamwood. The other part of the surprise element was that Mary wanted to have the quilt put up on April 1, Jim's actual birthday (no foolin'). The quilt was actually put up on April 1, and yes, Jim was pleasantly surprised.

The quilt pattern Mary selected is of four maple leaves, each painted in a different color. The name of the pattern is called Autumns Rainbow and is mounted on a former dairy barn on the Kriha property north of Birnamwood.

Jim is the third generation to operate the farm that was started by his grandfather. He took over the family farm at the age of 15 when his dad, Joe, died. When Jim sold the dairy herd in 1991, the herd totaled 32 milking cows and about that number of young stock.

Kriha Maple Syrup

Kriha's Maple Syrup was started 40 years ago when Jim learned the "secret" from his father, Joe. He actually began cooking syrup for his family when he was 19 years old. His family and friends started the maple syrup operation in a shack behind the Kriha homestead surrounded by maple trees. Many years were spent in the old shack in the woods producing this natural sweet syrup. In 1991, Jim renovated half the existing garage on the Kriha homestead into a syrup house. With the renovation, he also switched from cooking down the syrup from a pan to an evaporator, which allows for more syrup to be cooked down in a shorter period of time.

With the business growing, Jim built a complete building for producing syrup in 1998, which includes the evaporator room, finishing room and retail area. "It took many years to get to where we are today," Jim said, "but it has been worth every step and we still produce the same great tasting natural syrup as we did when we started 40 years ago."

The Kriha retail shop is open seven days a week where syrup is offered in several different size containers. Custom gift baskets are offered that include syrup and maple sugar candy. To place an order or for more information, call 715-449-2936.

Jim and Mary have two daughters, Dana and Jenna, and a son, Bryan. "We are just so pleased to be part of the barn quilt project," Mary said. "And I couldn't have been given a better birthday present," Jim added.

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.