

County's 261st Barn Quilt is All About Family

Shawano County's 261st barn quilt is now on display on at W10386 Sandy Lane about six miles west of Shawano, just off county highway M. It was sponsored by Bob and Jill Cone and Jill's sister, Kim Egan, for their mother, Dora Egan, who owns the farm with her son Tom.

Dora is the seventh and youngest child of Otto and Lillie Moede, who bought the farm on March 18, 1925 from Herman and Hanna Heller. The property was used as a small dairy farm and was originally 80 acres. Otto delivered their children there, but the eighth child had complications at birth and both the baby and Otto's young wife Lillie died.

Dora was three years old when her mother died and her older sister, Alice, had to drop out of school to help raise the six younger siblings: Lila, Elda, Alvin, Janice, Jack and Dora. Times were extremely tough.

The Moede kids worked hard on the farm, feeding the animals, milking the cows and tending the garden. But they also had creative ways of having fun. Once they crawled atop a small building and placed boards leading to the top of the barn roof and shimmied up to see the weather vane up close.

In the early 1940s, Otto bought one of the first hay balers in Shawano County. He was hired by farmers all over the county to help with their harvests, so the investment paid off.

Otto's sons joined the service and moved to Milwaukee and were not interested in farming, so Otto sold the dairy herd in 1951. Dora graduated from Shawano High School in 1953. She then moved to Milwaukee, met the son of Irish immigrants, Tom Egan, got married and they had four children.

Otto was not afraid to live on the edge. On his birthday, he would stand on his head on the barn roof. He was legendary around town for his ability to make moonshine. In 1988, he suffered a devastating stroke. So Dora moved back to the farm to care for him. He died in 1991 and his secret moonshine recipe died with him.

The barn quilt, painted by the Shawano County barn quilt committee, was designed to depict the 90 years of Moede/Egan family ownership. The images on the quilt all have special meaning. The tractor depicts the farming life. The shamrock represents Dora's new life with her Irish husband. The paw print represents the many dogs and cats that have lived on the farm over the years. And the moonshine jug is a reminder of Otto's "hobby."

Also on the quilt pattern are stars in each corner that represent Dora's four children: Jill, Kim, Ellen and Tom. They also represent the rank of Dora's son in law, Robert Cone, who is our country's 201st Army Four-Star General (200th behind George Washington).

"Through all the decades, the barn has stood tall," Jill said. "It provided warmth and shelter to the animals, kept their food dry, and was a place for kids to play hide and seek. It saw the crazy antics of kids trying to see a weather vane up close and a man standing on his head. And finally, it has been a witness to the history of the Moede family, both tragic and triumphant."

The quilt was put on display by Bruce Teetzen and Keith Raddant 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 via 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.