

County's 231st Barn Quilt has a Modern Art Feel

"I couldn't have thought of a nicer retirement gift," is the way Linda Olson described her excitement when she found out her co-workers at the UW-Extension office in Shawano had decided to give her a barn quilt when she left her post after 24 years as the county's Family Living Educator this past year. "I was really touched because I think the barn quilts are so neat," Linda said.

The quilt pattern Linda picked, called Horses of a Different Color, has an Andy Warhol feel to it, with brightly colored repetitive horse images. Linda has been around horses all her life, so having a horse pattern for her quilt was the obvious choice. Linda's husband, Dave, wasn't quite sold on the quilt pattern at first, but now is very happy with it. "I wasn't sure of the colors either," Linda said, "so I spent all last Super Bowl Sunday playing around with different color combinations. It's kind of funny that we ended up using the colors I saw in the original pattern."

After deciding on the quilt pattern, the even bigger decision Linda and Dave had to make was what they were going to do with their barn. It was in bad shape and putting a barn quilt on it without fixing it was not an option. They decided to have it restored. So far a new roof is in place, portions of the foundation have been rebuilt, and the end where the quilt is displayed has been painted. "We are so glad the barn quilt provided the impetus for us to fix the barn," Dave said. "It was the right decision."

The farm where the Olsons live is at W7304 Belle Plaine Avenue south of Shawano. It was originally homesteaded by a Thimke family in the late 1850s. When William and Emma Thimke took over the farm in 1902, they had the barn built, which took five years. They cut their own timber, took logs to a sawmill and brought them back to dry before using them on the barn. An old photo shows more than 30 men working on the barn.

William and Emma had an eight-cow dairy herd along with chickens and sheep. One of their five sons, Elmer, stayed on the farm. His son, Bob, a longtime jeweler in Shawano, spent a lot of time on the farm as a youth. "I really enjoyed the farm," Bob said, "and I remember Grandma Emma being an amateur horticulturist and having a great strawberry patch. People would come to pick their own berries and paid 30 cents a quart."

The Olsons have lived on the farm since 1988 after buying it from Wally Hanson. They have four draft horses and enjoy taking them on wagon rides. Their barn quilt is Shawano County's 231st. It 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's 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.