

Rural Health Initiative Sponsors County's 251st Barn Quilt

In honor of its ten years of serving farm families in Shawano County, the Rural Health Initiative (RHI) has sponsored the county's 251st barn quilt. It is displayed on a barn owned by Kevin and Kim Rank at N7134 County V, Cecil. The quilt pattern is called Rural Connections. Rhonda Strebels, executive director of the RHI, said the name is very appropriate. "When you combine the family connections with our faith and health, the name makes sense," she said.

The farm where the quilt is displayed is in its fourth generation of ownership, starting in 1911 with William and Wilhelmina Wasmund. Their sons, Herbert and Harold, then owned the farm for a short time. It continued with the Wasmunds' daughter and son-in-law, Helen (Wasmund) and Andrew Rank, then to their son and daughter-in-law Ronald and Shirley (Temple) Rank. Today, it is owned by Ron and Shirley's son, Kevin, and his wife, Kim (Schlender) Rank.

Kim Rank said the oak tree in the center of the quilt pattern represents the kindness the Rural Health Initiative brings to the farm families it serves. An oak tree is also an important element in the logo for the Rural Health Initiative. "We think it (the tree) also serves as a symbol of the strength our families have in Christian faith," Kim said. "Through God's blessings, the four generations of our families have benefitted and prospered, and for that we are very thankful." The four corners of the quilt represent Ron and Shirley's four sons, Kevin, Greg, Chris and Jeff.

Rhonda Strebels, who is the granddaughter of Andrew and Helen Rank, was the first person hired to go to the farms as part of the Rural Health Initiative in 2004. She continues today as executive director of the program that has expanded to Outagamie, Waupaca and Marathon counties. Rhonda grew up on a farm on County V near Cecil, close to where the county's latest quilt is displayed. The barn no longer exists on the property, but it was her roots of growing up a farm girl and her fond memories of visiting her grandparents' home (on the same road) that she wanted to be a part of the effort to put a quilt on the Ranks' barn. "I just love the farm families we see and their connection to the rural life where I started," she said. "The tree in our logo represents the strong, sturdy farm families who are long standing in our communities."

The Rural Health Initiative (RHI) is a nonprofit organization with the mission to keep farm families healthy and safe. The mission is accomplished by a concept called 'kitchen wellness'. RHI has trained healthcare staff who go to the farm and make house calls to interested farm families. The visits include health screenings for cholesterol, blood pressure and diabetes. The testing is done at the home with results shared with the family at the time of the visit. Education and health coaching as well as referrals can be done at these visits as well.

The RHI 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 the Shawano County 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.