

Shawano Pathways Sponsors Third Barn Quilt, County's 213th

Shawano County's 213th barn quilt has been sponsored by Shawano Pathways. It is the third quilt sponsored by the group from a Mielke grant they received to promote the Bike the Barn quilts project that will culminate with the first annual Bike the Barn Quilts rally on September 28.

The quilt has a bicycle theme and is called Hooked on Biking. It is displayed on a barn at W9321 Highway 29, a few miles west of Shawano. Myrtle Behnke was born on the farm in 1929 and lives there today, although she sold the 73-acre farm to David and Barb Vande Hey in 2011. The farm was homesteaded by Myrtle's great grandparents, William and Emilia Erdmann, who were born in Germany and came to America in the 1860s.

Myrtle's grandparents, Julius and Augusta (Holty) Erdmann were the second generation to own the farm. They had three children, including Myrtle's father, Otto, who married Rose Justmann. Myrtle fondly recalls that her father-in-law Herman Justmann taught her how to polka.

Myrtle's parents had a dairy herd of about 30 Holstein cows and also had an apple orchard. Myrtle says she remembers driving horses for her dad when making hay for the cows. They had bee hives for the bees that would pollinate the apple trees and Myrtle said she had to watch the horses when her dad was cultivating corn so the swarm of bees wouldn't spook the horses.

Myrtle married Eugene Behnke in 1953. They continued to operate the dairy herd, although Myrtle worked off the farm for Farmers Hardware and then for the Outagamie County Department of Welfare. In 1970, she began working for the Cantwell-Peterson Clinic in Shawano doing data entry. She retired from there in 2006.

Myrtle inherited her parents' love of fishing and does a lot of fishing today. That's why there is a silhouette of a brook trout in the lower left hand quadrant of the barn quilt. "My mom and dad enjoyed trout fishing" Myrtle said, "so we always had fish to eat." On September 30, 1979, Myrtle was trout fishing with her mom in Oconto County. While they were fishing, her mom had a heart attack and died that day.

When highway 29 was expanded to four-lanes, land from the Behnke farm was used, which meant their original house and barn had to be demolished. They did move the Harvestore silo to its present location and also built Myrtle a new house, which she and Eugene moved into in 1996. "It was hard to see the old house go," Myrtle said, "but I like the new house too because I can watch the birds and other wildlife from my kitchen window."

Eugene died in 2003, but Myrtle lives on the farm and pays rent to the new owners. She still enjoys maintaining an apple orchard, planting flowers, feeding the birds and mowing the lawn. "I just enjoy being at home," she said. "I never thought I'd have a barn quilt. I really appreciate the bikers sponsoring it for me and I think it is just beautiful."

Shawano Pathways received a “Transform Wisconsin” grant in an effort to create healthier places to live, work and play. “The funding will allow the Shawano Pathways organization to elevate its work to promote physical activity among Shawano County residents,” according to Nancy Schultz, Family Living Educator at Shawano County-UW Extension. To get more information on upcoming events, efforts and opportunities to create a healthier Shawano County, contact Schultz at Nancy.Schultz@co.shawano.wi.us.

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.

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