

Always in Tune is Name of County's 269th Barn Quilt

Shawano County's 269th barn quilt is now on display on a farm owned by Cliff and Eileen Elertson, N2978 County K, Shawano. The name of the pattern, which features a guitar in the center, is Always in Tune. The quilt was sponsored by Tom Whitemarsh of Madison, Wisconsin, longtime friend of Jim and Irene Leuenberger of Shawano who have painted the majority of the barn quilts on display in Shawano County. It is the second quilt sponsored by Whitemarsh, the first in honor of his daughter Regina and this second one in honor of his son Karl. "I just think this is such a phenomenal project that I wanted to do something to support it," Whitemarsh said. Tom's grandfather was a farmer near Omro and his dad, Fred, was an agriculture instructor and was also supervisor of the Wisconsin State Farm.

The guitar in the center of the quilt is a very important element in the quilt pattern. Cliff started playing a guitar in high school and got his first guitar in the late 1940s. In 1977, he had a chance to go to Nashville and record two songs he composed. One was called "The Packer Hall of Fame" and the other "On the Feet of Me," which is a ballad about a pair of shoes, which Cliff said was inspired by a couples club they belonged to. Cliff still enjoys playing and singing with Country Partners, a band made up of Cliff and some of his friends.

Cliff recalls being at a disc jockey convention at the Andrew Jackson Hotel in Nashville in 1955 and seeing Elvis Presley perform. "I got to meet him and talk to him," Cliff said, "and even got his autograph." Cliff said he also got to see Chet Atkins that night, whom he called the best guitar player he ever heard.

The farm where Cliff and Eileen live was homesteaded in 1868 by Alfred Chase. It was a stage coach stopover known as the A.P Chase Inn. The stage route went from Appleton, Shiocton, Hilma, Leeman, Shawano and Riverside. Mr. Chase died in 1917. Cliff and Eileen live in the original house, although they have added onto it over the years.

Cliff's parents, Harry and Nettie Elertson, bought the 80-acre farm in 1942 from Harold Marquardt. They had three sons, Harold, Cliff and Doug. Cliff married Eileen Mathison in 1958 and they lived in Appleton until moving to the farm in April the following year. They had five sons, Steve, Rodney and Aaron, who built homes for their families on land that was part of the farm, Tim, who lives in Atlanta, and Danny, who died in 1979 at age 15. Cliff and Eileen have been blessed with eight grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

When Cliff and Eileen took over the farm, their dairy herd totaled nine Holstein cows along with a number of bred heifers. In 1967 they added onto the barn and put another addition on along with a milkhouse in 1970. At the peak they were milking nearly 50 cows and had close to 100 head including the young stock. The farm now totals 160 acres.

The Elertson quilt was painted by the Shawano County barn quilt committee and 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 jamesmleuenberger@yahoo.com or 715-524-5685. You can also contact Patti Peterson, tourism manager at the Shawano Country Chamber of Commerce at tourism@shawano.com or 715-524-2139. 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.