

Silver Needles Quilt Guild celebrates 35th anniversary in Salina

By GARY DEMUTH Salina Journal Apr 5, 2015



TOM DORSEY

Photos by TOM DORSEY/Salina Journal. Debbie Devine hosts a group of Silver Needles Quilt Guild members at her home to talk about the group's upcoming reunion April 20. Twelve quilters met at the home of Joan Henke in 1979 and formed the group. It now has more than 100 members.

Jan Brax credited the Silver Needles Quilt Guild with saving her life.

On Feb. 19, 1979, Brax attended the first meeting of a group of local quilting enthusiasts at the Salina home of Joan Henke. Before she could attend another meeting, however, Brax and her husband moved to Lincoln.



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They moved on a Friday, Brax remembered. The very next day, her husband died suddenly from a cerebral hemorrhage. When Brax returned to Salina three months later, she said she knew where to go for comfort and strength.

“The Quilt Guild saved my life,” she said. “I hadn’t been active before, but then I really started quilting. There are such awesome members here. We enjoy each other, and we enjoy quilting.”

Brax has been an active member of the Silver Needles Quilt Guild ever since.

When Toni Armstrong moved to Salina from her Wisconsin home nearly five years ago, she knew the first place she wanted to find was a local quilt shop.

“Anywhere there’s a quilt shop, I know I can meet quilters and make friends,” said Armstrong, who recently was elected president of the Silver Needles Quilt Guild. “It would have been hard for me to move if there hadn’t been quilting people here. When you meet fellow quilters, you make lifelong friends.”

Do everything but quilt

When 12 quilters met at Henke’s home in 1979, no one could have imagined 35 years later it would turn into a guild with more than 100 members and its own constitution.

Today, members of the Silver Needles Quilt Guild pay annual dues of \$20 and meet the third Monday of each month.

Meetings are at Redeemer Lutheran Church, 743 E. Magnolia. During the meeting, guild business is discussed, a program usually is presented by a quilting expert, and a “show and tell” of members’ quilting projects is shared, said member Karen Sutton.

“We do everything but quilt there,” she said. “It’s basically a business meeting and a program, not a quilting bee.”

For its 6:30 p.m. April 20th meeting, the guild is planning a 35th anniversary celebration. Charter members and former members are being invited to attend along with present members.

“We’ll do a PowerPoint presentation and have all our scrapbooks on loan from the Salina Public Library,” said member Deborah Divine. “We hope former members will come back to join us.”

Importance of 1976

Before 1976, the idea of forming a quilt guild was inconceivable, said Pat Walters, a charter member since 1979 and the guild’s historian.

“Quilting became popular again during the Bicentennial celebration in 1976,” she said. “Before that, you couldn’t find material at all. You didn’t have a lot of quilt shops or quilt books.”

At Henke’s home, the dozen women who showed up decided to form an organization to be called the Silver Needles Quilters. Annual dues of \$1 were charged, and ads were placed in the Salina Journal each month to encourage new quilters to join.

The Silver Needles Quilt Guild had their first official community quilt show in June 1981 at the Salina Bicentennial Center in conjunction with the Smoky Hill River Festival. That event did wonders to attract new members, Walters said, pulling in some 50 new members.

By that time, the group had renamed itself the Silver Needles Quilt Guild. Dues also went up to \$3 a year.

Meeting at a gun shop

After that initial gathering at the Henke home, the guild began meeting at University United Methodist Church, Santa Fe and Claflin. That lasted until December 1979, when members voted to add night meetings for those who worked during the day.

Soon after, they began scheduling evening meetings at a gun shop.

The firearms store, at Cloud and Broadway, was owned by Salinan Ray Mudd, whose wife, Lynn, was a guild member. Quilters would meet in the evenings, after the store had closed.

The gun shop location lasted only until June 1981, when growing membership necessitated a bigger meeting space. In early 1982, the guild relocated to the basement of Salina Presbyterian Manor, 2601 E. Crawford, where they would remain for the next 22 years.

“It was a great place to meet,” Brax said. “A lot of the residents came down to the meetings and would visit with us.”

Tried about every religion

In 2004, the guild moved its meetings to a larger multi-purpose room at Sunrise Presbyterian Church, 825 E. Beloit. Four years ago, meetings were moved to Redeemer Lutheran Church, where they have been ever since.

“We’ve tried about every religion,” joked member Katie Weis. “The Catholics will have to take us next.”

The Silver Needles Quilt Guild does a lot more than show off personal quilts made for friends and relatives, Divine said. The guild does many community service projects, including donating quilts for the prenatal unit at Salina Regional Health Center and bereavement quilts for stillborn babies.

Making quilts to donate

Quilts have been donated to the Morrison House, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Ashby House, Domestic Violence Association of Central Kansas, hospice, countries in need such as Honduras and for the Saline County Sheriff’s Office to take to children at crash scenes, Divine said.

“A lot of what we do is directed toward children,” she said. “You get very emotional, knowing your quilts are going to kids.”

Through the years, smaller quilting groups have formed within the guild and have worked together to accomplish both personal and community projects, said Martha Oakes, a member since 1992.

“Our group is called the Stitch and Bitch Club,” she said with a laugh.

Bus tours and workshops

Guild members also schedule periodic bus tours to area quilt shows and workshops, have helped underwrite a quilting program at Smoky Hills Public Television and host a yearly fundraiser that serves as a combination quilt show, luncheon and auction.

They also have donated sewing machines and materials for a quilting class taught by volunteer instructor Andra Hancock, at Salina Central High School and other area schools.

Charter member Jeanne Huscher said she not only loves the fellowship of like-minded quilters, they also help keep her disciplined.

“I’m a starter, not a finisher,” she said. “Without the quilt guild, I’d just be a fabric collector.”



Katie Weis

TOM DORSEY



Karen Sutton
TOM DORSEY



Jan Brax

TOM DORSEY

A quilter's guide

According to the Silver Needles Quilt Guild mission statement, the purpose of the guild "shall be to provide an avenue to enrich the community through quilt making, to stimulate an interest in quilts, to promote and advance the art of quilt making, to conduct educational programs and services in the design and techniques of quilt making and related subjects, and to encourage the preservation of quilts and their history."