

A History of the Oakville Quilters' Guild

By Ursula Thomson & Dawne Rudman

How it all began:

In the summer of 1994, a group of quilters decided to begin a new quilt guild in Oakville. Fourteen ladies met at the White Oaks Library and formed a planning committee. Only twelve remained as founding members. Information sharing, fellowship and informality were the main goals.

The first meeting was held on the third Thursday of October 1994 at St. Paul's United Church. The small auditorium of the church had a capacity for only 65 people but a few more managed to squeeze in. By the November meeting the membership was full and the guild had the first of many waiting lists.

The Oakville Quilters' Guild founding members:

Barbara Bays	Rosemary Clouse	Kathleen Davies
Connie Dorion	Louise Erwin	Marie Kajdasz
Kim Kernohan	Ruth Landon	Sharon MacMillan
Marie Poole	Janet Rhind	Diane Wolder

The purpose of the Guild became:

To provide a place for quilters to find fellowship and opportunities for information sharing as well as to provide a vehicle for developing workshops, sew and chats and personal development.

The first year of the newly formed Guild culminated in June with a potluck supper to celebrate the first successful year. The tradition continues and at each June meeting members celebrate with a potluck supper. The following year the Guild moved to larger premises at Central Baptist Church, where it remains to the present.

How do you organize a new quilt guild when you have no money, supplies or enough members?

This was the situation the founders of the Oakville Quilters' Guild found themselves in. With hard work, enthusiasm and the generosity of many: letters were sent to ladies from other nearby guilds inviting them to the first meeting; fliers were given to quilt shops and guilds; a starting library was established with donations from members, quilt shops and other guilds; positions were allocated and guest speakers, who graciously offered to come without remuneration, were lined up.

A Block-of-the-Month was soon started, a program for the year developed, an outreach group began, workshops were lined up, a newsletter was printed and a logo contest held.

A design by Connie Dorion was voted the winner and her daughter, a graphic artist, did the formal artwork so that it could be used for our banner, pins, letterhead and website.

The founding members made sure that the new Oakville Guild would reflect the needs and wants of its participants. Themes which recurred again and again were those of friendship - kinship, fellowship, meeting new people – fun and sharing information about a common passion, quilting. These are aspects of the Guild that we still treasure and look forward to today.

The planning committee also made sure that the meetings had sufficient structure and organization. Space at St. Paul's that first year was limited, so the membership was kept at 65. A meeting format was established, a bank account was opened, and a Library / Information / Problem Corner was set up. For the latter, two members were available at each meeting to address questions on quilting problems. Newsletters were sent out by mail in those days – on this front we have definitely modernized!

Each meeting generally started with a short business section, with brief reports from the various committee members. A speaker or activity, Block-of-the-Month, an ever-popular Bring and Brag and of course social time followed this, with members bringing lovely treats for all to sample.

Our Banner

The Oakville Quilters' Guild banner, (a wall hanging) hangs at the front of the room for every meeting. A number of people worked on the banner – sketching, stitching and hand quilting. The design is a depiction of an oval shield with oak leaves and brown acorns on a background of blue-and-white sky, or water. The label on the back explains its meaning. It symbolizes Oakville, and many of the characteristics of quilting, such as the continuous line of the oak leaf, the triangular-like facets of the acorn and the cross hatched background surrounded by radiating lines that represent the sky and water.

Block of the Month

From the beginning of the Guild this has always been a popular feature. We've worked on easy blocks, theme blocks, pieced blocks, appliquéd and paper-pieced blocks. Members have been challenged, frustrated at times, but happy to learn a new skill or technique.

In the beginning, each participant would post her block on the wall and put her name in a box. The names were then drawn and each sewer could take a block. We tried “bring-a-block, take-a-block” when we made two blocks, one to keep and one to trade. The last few years we’ve found that participation increased when each participant could keep her own block – it was easier for colour selection and skill levels. Block-of-the-month participation has always been voluntary and some blocks ended up in a UFO pile, some were donated to our Outreach program, while others were made into quilts. BOM’s remain a fixture in our guild.

Challenges

There were other challenges as well. One year we had a “mystery quilt” – what fun to see it all come together! This past year saw another “mystery quilt” and the membership was treated to the reveal at the June potluck.

Then there were the “Piece-Za” challenges, which produced some outstanding quilts. A theme and fabric was included in each pizza box, to be made into a block of the member’s choice; after completion of a block, the box was passed on to the next participant. At the end, everyone drew a box with the completed series of blocks. The format of the second “Piece-Za “ challenge varied somewhat with members having the option to choose their own theme and fabric and get their own box back at the end of the year.

One year we had a *Crazy Nine-patch* pattern shown at the *walkabout* and members were challenged to make one for the next meeting. Seventeen fabulous quilt tops were the result! In April 2013 another challenge was issued – this time, to create two small *ticker tape* quilts and bring them along to the September meeting.

We also had:

- A *Round Robin Challenge* with quilters from Virginia
- A most successful Guild fabric challenge
- Two “President’s Challenges” - Northcott Fabrics kindly donated three fabrics for our first challenge. Kits were made up and sold to members with proceeds going towards our second Quilt Show. The results of the second “President’s Challenge were displayed at our third Quilt Show in 2012.

Workshops

Over the years, the Guild has been fortunate to offer workshops from both our talented guild members and outside instructors, to give us new skills and inspirations – most at a reasonable cost. When there were no workshops, UFO

days fulfilled a service to sew and learn from one another and, a good number of UFO's made it to the next stage and got finished.

Here are some topics of the wonderful workshops and classes held since the Guild's started: colourwash, machine quilting, tote bags, appliqué, advent calendars and other Christmas projects, landscapes, reversible quilts, Victorian and other dolls, scrap quilts, postage stamp quilts, English paper piecing, mug totes, ragged edge quilts, painting with threads, embellishing, Underground Railroad quilt, landscape postcards, jackets and vests, penny rugs, hand quilting, hand dyeing, choosing colour, crazy patchwork, friendship circles, quilting in sections ... and others.

Outreach

The beginnings of the Outreach program:

When the Guild was formed, an Outreach program to benefit the community was always part of the mandate. Guild members worked on a charity quilt in the first year, which was auctioned off at the end of that year.

In 1998 the program really took off and a small group of ladies, got together and started quilting. Soon more ladies were rounded up and the Oakville Sewing Center offered them room to work. After donating twenty quilts to Ian Anderson House - plus a raffle quilt, the Preemies at Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital were given twenty-five baby quilts in December of 1999.

Outreach now meets at St. Paul's Church on Rebecca Street, Oakville and 8-12 members have gathered on the second Tuesday of the month ever since. However, about three-quarters of our membership have worked on Outreach quilts at one time or another, either with the group or at home.

The letters of thanks received are heart warming - older folks who have few visitors except the Meals-on-Wheels deliveries and who were surprised with a quilt to warm them; young mothers who received a baby quilt for their little ones although they had precious little else; crisis victims who were cheered by a warm quilt; terminally ill patients who rejoiced at the sight of a colourful quilt on their beds.

Our Outreach quilts have gone to:

- Ian Anderson House
- Oakville Lifecare Center
- Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital,
- Erinoak Respite Centre, Oakville
- S.E.N.A.C.A.
- Healthy Babies Healthy Children
- SAVIS of Halton (Rape crisis center)
- The Salvation Army Hospice (quilts were donated for their opening)

- Meals on Wheels
- Wellspring – (Cancer support network)
- Women's Information and Support Center
- Breast Cancer Research (MADGE)
- Oakville Humane Society
- Hope Place (Drug and alcohol rehabilitation center)
- Lion's Foundation of Canada (Guide Dogs)
- Oakville Parent Child Center
- Canadian Diabetes Association
- The Red Cross
- St. Paul's Church
- Parent Child Foundation
- Across Canada Group-Oakville Branch (Quilts for Canada program)
- Big Sisters Big Brothers of Halton
- Kerr Street Ministries
- University Women's Club – Oakville Chapter (Scholarship Fund)
- Curves for Women (silent auction to benefit Kerr Street Ministries)
- Erinoak Respite Camp
- The Women's Centre at Hopedale Mall
- The Charlie Fund

Our Outreach efforts have also stretched further afield in Ontario and internationally as well, with projects that include:

- Native Canadian Centre – flood relief fund for the Kashechewan First Nation located near James Bay in Northern Ontario.
- The orphans of Chernobyl and donations to a Russian orphanage
- Japanese Tsunami relief
- Loving Arms – Chartwell Baptist Church (Disadvantage people in Guatemala)
- Grace Children's Hospital, Haiti (Earthquake) [see below]
- Slave Lake (Wild fires) [see below]

Project Haiti

The guild has been involved in charitable work over the years, both through Outreach and individual causes. Our members came through once again when the devastating earthquake in Haiti struck.

A local practitioner who also works at a children's hospital in Haiti, became our link to the tragedy. When asked what could be done to help the children treated there who now had no shelter, bedding or medicines, a plan was brought to the executive.

All 50/50 draws beginning in January would be put into a fund for the hospital's rebuilding. Of course, there was quilting to be done and due to the climate, quilts for the children would simply be two pieces of cotton fabric stitched together (no batting).

In March, fifteen quilters got together at the Oakville Museum to sew and many colourful quilts were produced. But that was not all. At the next guild meeting, more members brought quilts that they, or family members, had done on their own at home. One quilter came with seventeen and apologized she couldn't do more! The final count was 174 quilts for the Grace Children's Hospital.

Again, that was not all. Members generously donated quilting supplies and eleven lovely baskets were made up by the program coordinators and auctioned off at the May Guild meeting, with all proceeds going to the reconstruction efforts.



Above: Members of staff of Grace Children's Hospital, Haiti, together with a thrilled recipient of one of our quilts.

Quilts for Slave Lake

Starting off in a small way, this project took off and kept growing until it grew into an unbelievable mountain of quilts. The Guild contribution included: five pairs of hand knitted socks, one small pair of pink PJs, three carry bags, sixteen small Beanie Babies, twelve knitted teddy bears, eight handmade velvet teddy bears, twenty-two children's knitted toques, six "preemie" toques and two "preemie" sweater sets, six pillowcases, five knitted afghans and ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY beautiful quilts!

Thanks from Slave Lake

Two little girls in Slave Lake were surprised with quilts that had been made for them by two little Burlington, Ontario girls. It is so wonderful to have a story such as this occur during a time when all of Slave Lake is feeling so out of sorts to say the least. When I think of how much both pairs of children are learning from this and what they can take with them into the future it really warms my heart. The kindness and generosity of the girls in Burlington shines through and their parents need to be applauded for the obvious caring upbringing they have already instilled upon them. And here in Slave Lake our two little girls are learning how the kindness of strangers that brings tears to their Mother's eyes makes days of not having a house to go home to seem somewhat bearable. Knowing how much others want to do what ever they can to help them and all the rest of the Slave Lakers that have lost their homes get through this tough time will make them strong young adults who I am sure if called upon will pay it forward many times. Thank you Hailey and Courtney for your precious gift of love.

More thanks from Slave Lake

"I am one of hundreds of residents displaced as a result of the Slave Lake, Alberta wildfire on May 15. The generosity of spirit of Canadians, whether through kind words of encouragement or donations, have been overwhelming and so appreciated. I would like to commend the Quilters Guilds from across the country that took on the task of making and donating homemade quilts to all of us who lost our homes. I was blessed to receive one from Bev of the Oakville Quilters Guild. While I have never met this fine lady, I can certainly see the love and care she took in making my quilt. I lost all the quilts my grandmother made me so many years ago but this new one will be so treasured. Thank you to all Canadian quilters from a Slave Lake friend.
Donna Melvin, Slave Lake, Alberta".



Young and young at heart send a hug to Slave Lake. ALL WRAPPED UP: Hayley Berseth, 11, left, and her sister Courtney, 7, hold quilts they made with their grandmother, Patricia Phillips, in response to a call from the Oakville Quilters Guild to assist 700 families left homeless in the wake of wildfires that destroyed the town of Slave Lake, Alberta. The guild has amassed more than 150 quilts to be shipped next week to Alberta. *Michael Ivanin / Oakville Beaver*



Blankets of generosity

Seven-year-old Cameron Palmer (left) and 10-year-old Hayley Shaw show their gifts at the Patchwork Fabrics store on July 20. Young Shaw received her quilt from an Oakville, Ont. girl whose name also happens to be Hayley (Berseth). As of July 16, Patchwork Fabrics has distributed 381 quilts donated from quilters across the country.

More on quilts on Page 34