

QUILTING, a not-so-lost art form!

By Jessica Brassard

“The stress free creativity of quilt making allows you to create beautiful but functional art.” Tracey White, owner We R Quilts, Prescott

Quilting is a tradition that dates back to before European and Dutch settlers came to North America. Purely functional and born out of necessity, the modern day quilt looks much different than its original counterpart. Over the years, as fabrics and sewing machines from

all over the world have become readily available and affordable, quilting evolved passed the hole mending patchwork blanket, flourishing into a remarkable, social art form. It did for a time; bring together women of all ages to work towards a central goal. Although in the last few decades, as

quilts became less essential and more mass produced by companies, quilting seemed to decrease in popularity. In more recent years quilting has re-immersed, making its comeback with not only veteran sewers but also with a younger audience wishing to learn the craft. It seemed they had an appetite to create not only blankets but also bags, place mats, wall hangings and so much more.

So why is there such an interest in a seemingly lost art? “Many reasons,” Tracey White of We-R-Quilts in Prescott stated. “Baby boomers are using it as a pastime in their retirement. People are getting back to their roots. Sewing a quilt was something Grandma used to do. Now that Grandma is gone, people see there is a void in talent. With basic sewing skills no longer being taught in schools, quilting has become something people always wanted to learn. When you don’t have access to something, you clamour for it.” Some others are using quilting as a stress reliever. “Once you know the technique, you can just focus



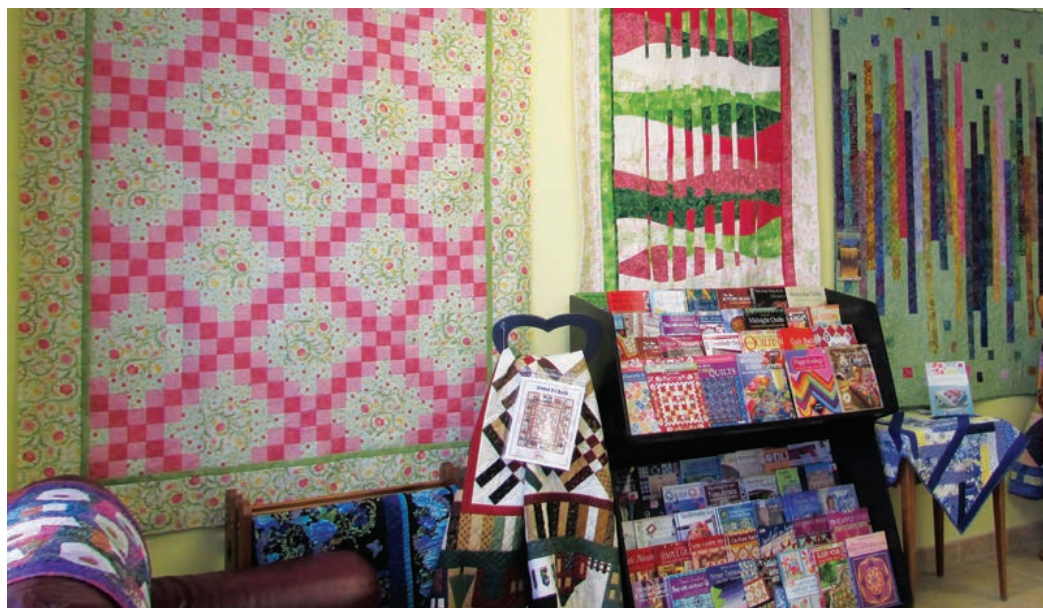
Laurel & Tracey White, We R Quilts, Prescott ON.

on the artistry of quilt making. Become an artist. People feel the creativity and a sense of accomplishment." Laurel White of We R Quilts observed. "Like Tracey, our colour guru, who turned to quilting for a relaxing hobby when she was just 24 and at that time she was the youngest in her class. That would not be the case today. "One third of our customers are in their thirties or younger." Tracey noted. "The stress free creativity of quilt making, allows you to create beautiful but functional art. You grow with your work." Donna Taylor added, "People want to create a quilt to enjoy the challenge, show their talent and be proud of their work."

Another potential reason quilting has increased in popularity, is that accessibility of quilting classes has increased. Both Taylor Sewing Centre Quilt Shop Brockville (www.taylorsewing.com) and We R Quilts Prescott (www.werquilts.com) offer a wide variety of classes, beginner to advanced, with classes specific to making placemats, bags, cushions, block work as well as the occasional sewing machine class. Workshops are also provided by the Thousand Island Quilters Guild Brockville (www.thousandislandquiltersguild.com). Schedules can be found on their website.

Tracey White advises, "You take a beginners class, so you get hands on attention. People can learn at their own pace and don't forget to start small." Donna Taylor suggests, "Start basic and work up. Take a class and learn the fundamentals, the terminology and the basics of quilting. Clothes come in and go out of style but a quilt is an heirloom, with a sense of history." Donna Taylor stated.

A surprising fact about the quilting community is the amount of charity that is involved. Donna Taylor noted "Most people that come into our store want to do something for someone else. Giving a gift, giving a part of yourself, making something unique that can last forever. I give away 90% of the quilts I make." Tracey White agreed, that most people are "making a quilt for someone else or for some event. Quilting is used to help." Jackie Peterson, a member of the Thousand Islands Quilters Guild, weighed in concerning quilting and contributing to the community. She suggests, "Helping neighbours and friends, people in your own backyard, starting charity at home." Countless quilts are donated each year. The Fire Department of Gananoque and the Township of Leeds and the Thousand Islands carry blankets in every truck for fire fighters to give out to families in need. Quilts are made for sick babies at



the Civic who lack the comforts of home. Victoria's Quilts have local chapters all over Canada and make blankets for sufferers and survivors of cancer, in memory of cancer victim Victor Ann Morrison. The Blue Trunk program make quilts to keep on hand in case of an emergency in the community. The Thousand Island Quilter's Guild also works with Habitat for Humanity, so every new homeowner has a blanket to cover their bed when they move into their home. Baby quilts are also donated to Tummy Time in Brockville, a program that focuses on helping young mothers at risk to acquire parenting skills. The blanket the baby plays on during the classes is then given to the mother after completion of the course as an incentive to finish. The nice thing about this type of charity work is that it allows quilters to donate their time and effort as much as the materials for a quilt. With all the amazing contributions quilters are making to the community, its no wonder quilting is making a comeback.

To get involved or donate your time, visit www.victoriasquiltscanada.com, www.thousandislandsquiltersguild.com/membership.htm.

Quilt - A blanket usually made as a bed covering, comprised of three layers, (quilt top, batting and backing), and sewn together with multiple decorative stitching.

Pictured here is a "Cot to Coffin Quilt." The origins of these unique quilts date back to 1812, when soldiers were made quilts (30in X 70in) to fit a standard soldier's cot or coffin as needed. Small and light enough to be carried by foot soldiers this quilt no doubt brought warmth to those needing it most. LH

