

A Warm Welcome

The Festival of Quilts invites folks to come "hang out" on the Bay de Verde Peninsula.
By Linda Browne

There's perhaps nothing

more synonymous with Newfoundland and Labrador culture than the humble, colourful, cosy quilt. Whether made out of necessity to keep loved ones warm, or given as a gift to celebrate a marriage, a new child or some other milestone, each thread would be stitched with love and, traditionally, made with whatever materials were on hand. These practical expressions of affection are often handed down through the generations, making a beloved keepsake.



Ray Mackey photo



Some quilts on display during the festival include commissioned pieces from collectors, such as Richard Walsh's Peace Quilt (above) and Shirley Pryor's memory quilt (right). *Wayne Parsons photos*

"A lot of people's grandmothers were just makers and used whatever they had... nothing was ever thrown away and nothing was ever discarded... And my favourite sort of reflection on that is once when I was in high school, I said to my grandmother, 'I'd love to have a quilt.' And she said, 'Would ya?'... She got up and took the curtains down and made a quilt there and then for me... it's just that instinct. And I always thought that was absolutely beautiful," recalls Deena (Dee) Riggs. "And I still have that quilt, and I keep it in a cedar chest because that's a treasure for me."

These days, Dee is the coordinator of the Festival of Quilts – an event that invites quilt makers and quilt lovers to the Bay de Verde Peninsula to connect and "hang out," learn and



Shawn Hyde and Brian Nolan demonstrate some quiltwork in Red Head Cove *Wayne Parsons photos*



share skills, and soak in breathtaking displays while celebrating handmade tradition and cultural creativity.

A Common Thread

First held in 2019, the Festival of Quilts (which covers the communities of Bay de Verde, Grates Cove and Red Head Cove) stemmed from a shared vision to develop tourism in the area.

"The goal was to get people to come

right down to the end of what was then the Baccalieu Trail, and what is now the Baccalieu Coastal Drive," says Dee (who spent part of her youth in Bay de Verde, where her parents are from).

While they planned for a couple of hundred people to show up for the inaugural event, Dee says they welcomed well over 1,000 visitors. "[We] felt like, okay, we're onto something here," she says.

Even though the pandemic put the event on pause the past two summers, the festival team kept busy producing a series of videos called "Common Threads" for the Bay de Verde tourism website. The videos highlight local history and people, and the special quilts in their lives. Last year they hosted a Hangout, whereby residents were encouraged to display their quilts on their own clotheslines, creating a colourful tapestry for all to enjoy outdoors at a safe pandemic-era distance.

This summer, the festival is back in full swing. Taking place August 19-21, it will feature a makers' market, with fabric vendors, and a quilters' café at the RC Hall. There will also be workshops and presentations with Ralph Jarvis and Corey Follett of The Quilted Stash (who recently released a book of the same name, featuring Newfoundland and Labrador inspired quilting projects); a landscape appliqué workshop by quilter Colleen McLean; and a photography workshop to teach quilters about lighting and other techniques for taking good photos of their creations.

"We're also going to do something a little different: partnering with a block printer. And she's going to actually carve the block, but people



can come and make a block print of a quilt design,” Dee adds.

“It’s important for us to have something that’s kid friendly and senior friendly... where they can come and sort of engage on some level.”

Whale of a Time

And of course, there are quilt displays at the churches and halls in Bay de Verde, Grates Cove and Red Head Cove, and on the many clotheslines strung throughout the area.

“It’s an exhibit, you know, as much as going to an art gallery kind of deal. The first year we used both the RC church and the Anglican church in Bay de Verde. And I don’t think any of us had really counted on how emotional an experience that would be. There was just something really special about seeing the quilts laid over the pews. It just worked really beautifully together,” Dee says.

“We had a story quilt category, which was my favourite, because people actually wrote something up to go with their quilt. So we had quilts from the coast of Labrador. We had a quilt made from the bandanas that one of our quilters used when

Some of the biggest attractions during the festival are the quilt exhibits in the local churches.



she was going through chemotherapy... A couple of them were form and function, made from scraps, made by someone’s great-grandmother out of things around the house. It just celebrates all different types of quilts.”

With the help of a Come Home Year grant, the festival team has engaged 31 local quilters to create small wall quilts based on the theme “Sea of Whales” (fitting, considering the number of whales that frolic in local waters in the summer). These

lines built. They can come and they can hang; they can sell their quilts. We don’t take any commission of any quilts that are sold because we want the quilters to make as much as they can on the quilts,” she adds.

The festival is also partnering with other local groups. For example, the Baccalieu View Walking Trail in Red Head Cove will host a lighthouse quilt exhibit and a children’s scavenger hunt.

As for the future of the event, Dee and her team are aiming high. “I’ve

always sort of said that I want this to grow to be an international festival... but we’re still in very early years in terms of what we can do. But I want to see it happen every single year moving forward. I want to bring in international quilters. I want it to be a destination quilt festival,” she says.

Thinking back upon the quilt that her grandmother lovingly made for her years ago, Dee hopes the Festival of Quilts gives others a chance to create special moments with their loved ones.

“The first year that we had this, there was more than one person who said to me, ‘Oh my god, I just can’t wait to get my mom and my nan in the car, and we’re going to make a day of it; we’re going to come down, we’re going to have something to eat. We’re just going to enjoy that time together.’ So I think that’s such a special thing, to create an event [where] you can say people are making memories together.” ☺

Find the Festival of Quilts on Facebook @festivalofquiltsbaydeverde.



will be displayed at the RC Hall, along with a 50-foot quilted whale. The goal, Dee says, is to have the exhibit travel to other places as well.

Based on the previous event, Dee expects hundreds of quilts to be on display during the festival, which she calls a “photographer’s dream.”

“I mean, those communities, and just the quilts flapping in the wind... it’s so beautiful,” she says.

“We also welcome people to come into the community and hang their own quilts. We’ve had some clothes-