

Seaport Stitchers Quilt Guild

By Pat Johnson



Seaport Stitchers display at Tuckerton Seaport.
Photo credit: Tuckerton Seaport.

In 2024, the Seaport Stitchers celebrated their 25th Anniversary. This dedicated group of seamstresses in Southern Ocean County love their art and helping others through charity giving. They meet every Tuesday and two Saturdays each month for a “free sew” at Little Egg Harbor’s Edward B. Thornton Community Center to work on their projects and to socialize. Once a month they have their business meeting at the First United Presbyterian Church in Tuckerton where they participate in a ‘Show and Tell.’

On a recent Tuesday, six members of the club were working at their sewing machines; Lisa Baldwin and Laurie Didyk from Little Egg Harbor, Heather Reenstra from Toms River, Nancy Daniani from Barnegat, Loreen Wise from Mullica Township, and Jill DeFelice from Tuckerton.

Laurie Didyk is a retired nurse practitioner and finds she is working harder than ever on her charity work with the Seaport Stitchers and another quilting group, ‘Quilts of Valor, New Jersey Shore Chapter.’ She and Loreen Wise from Mullica Township started the local chapter a year ago and that group has already donated 15 red, white and blue quilts to veterans. “We realized there was a need in Ocean County.”

Nancy Daniani, a quilter from Staten Island found Seaport Stitchers when she moved to Barnegat in January. She enjoys the camaraderie. “They meet all year long and are the most focused group in their charity works. It’s very unique.”

Each year the guild chooses three charities to focus on. This year they are making and donating comfort quilts for hospice patients at the Hackensack Meridian Hospital in Manahawkin and the nation-wide ‘Quilts for Kids’ program that makes quilts for children facing serious illness, trauma, abuse or natural disasters. And they continue to make placemats and napkins for Meals on Wheels recipients in Ocean County. “We usually disperse these around the holidays with a small gift,” said Jill DeFelice.

This year they are proud to be participating in the 250th Anniversary of the nation by partnering with the Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission on an ‘America 250’ quilt that will tell the story of Ocean County through the municipal seals of the 33 county towns. Individual members will stitch the panels to create a large quilt that will be dedicated to the county. They will also make a duplicate panel to give to the towns.

The guild holds quilt raffles and sales of finished work. Each member donates something to sell. Every year they have at least one show and sale at the Tuckerton Seaport, the next is on May 3rd in the Hunting Shanty. They also are part of the Seaport’s Jersey Shore Folklife Center and they exhibit during the annual Barnegat Bay Decoy and Gunning show in September.



Top: Stitchers hold handmade centerpieces for their 25th anniversary celebration, 2024.
Middle: President's Day Pinwheel Class.
Bottom: Stitchers bag making workshop.
Photo credit: Seaport Stitchers.



In just a few years the guild has doubled in size to include 40 members. Guild members have the privilege of buying fabric from the guild at reduced prices and using the bulk-purchased batting. Few quilts are hand sewn these days; the quilting of the pieced fabric is almost always made by machine—guided by each seamstress. Many of the members own a long-arm machine which can be loaded with the roll of fabric and then guided by them over the surface of the quilt. This allows for a variety of quilt patterns.

The Stitchers occasionally offer a Beginner's workshop, usually for 4 weeks on a Saturday to teach the basics of quilting and how to care for their machine, participants get to take home a finished project. "Quilters are like artists," said DeFelice, "They mentor each other."

The Guild also holds workshops for their members from well-known quilters who have a special technique or challenging pattern to teach. Many of the members admit they are a bit compulsive about their hobby. Lisa Baldwin said she gets up at 6 a.m. to sew for an hour before going to work and then sews a couple of hours after work. "It's my therapy," she explained. "I enjoy the creativity of it."

Both DeFelice and Didyk both admitted to taking their sewing machines when on vacation. And the group sponsors two quilting retreats—one to Lancaster Pa. in the fall where there are quite a few quilting fabric shops and a second to American Keswick in Whiting in the spring. Both the hotel in Pa. and Keswick accommodate the Stitchers by providing conference rooms, tables and enough electrical outlets for their machines. "It's wonderful," said Jill. "You can quilt from eight in the morning until midnight if you want."

43rd Old Time Barnegat Bay Decoy & Gunning Show

STANLEY "TIP" SEAMAN COUNTY PARK

SAT., SEPT. 27, 7 AM - 5 PM

SUN., SEPT. 28, 7 AM - 4 PM

Free Shuttles at: Pinelands Regional High School, Tuckerton
Seaport, Freedom Fields County Park

HANDS ON ACTIVITIES

Archery
Kids Crafts
Carving & Folk Art Demos
Drop-in Folk Art Crafts
Life-size checkers/chess
Cornhole
Ornament weaving
Decoy Painting

FEATURING

Dock Dog Demos
New & Antique Decoys
Duck Boats
Boat Rides
Presentations
Hunting & Fishing Gear
Food Vendors
Art & Photo Exhibit
Musical Performances

CONTESTS

NEW! Advanced Carvers
Decoy Carving
Boat Building
Model Boats
Calling
Skeet Shooting
Retrievers
Art & Photo



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