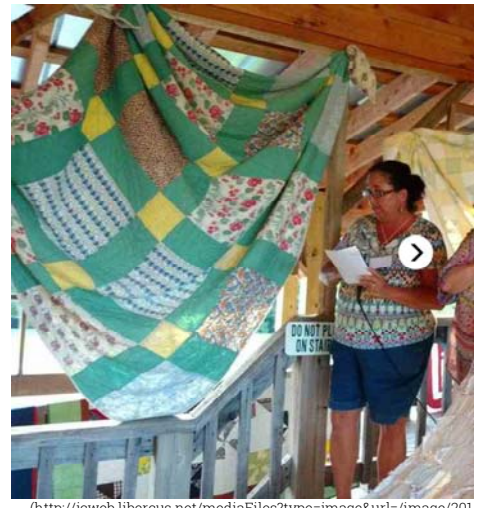


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Contributed

2 / 8 Linda Crouch, an avid quilter in the area, poses with her quilt in front of the corresponding Quilt Trail panel on Crouch Barn on Picken's Bridge Road. The Northeast Tennessee Quilt Trail is the largest section in the nation.

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Do you have a story folded in your attic?

[/authors?](#)**NATHAN BAKER** ([/AUTHORS?USER=NATHAN%20BAKER](#)) • APR 1, 2017 AT 7:41 PM[user=nathan%20baker@johnsoncitypress.com](mailto:nathan%20baker@johnsoncitypress.com) (<mailto:nathan%20baker@johnsoncitypress.com>)[20baker](#)

University students and local nonprofit employees are hoping to uncover and stitch together untold histories of Northeast Tennessee families using the quilts they warmed themselves with through generations.

With funding provided by a grant last summer from the Tennessee Arts Commission, the Quilt Trail of Northeast Tennessee created the Quilt Story Booth, a project to document and preserve the folk life surrounding quilts and their makers.

"The quilting tradition is so rich in the area, we usually end up with amazing stories," AmeriCorp Vista for the Appalachian Resource Conservation and Development Council Rachael Wheeler said. "We use the quilts as the catalyst but the stories are not always about the quilt, sometimes they're about a member of the family or a historical place, we're never sure what we're going to get when go out to collect these stories."

The Quilt Trail of Northeast Tennessee is an ongoing Appalachian RC&D Council program cataloging and celebrating regional quilt designs and the stories behind them. The program is responsible for the colorful painted quilt squares hanging from old barns in six nearby counties.

Wheeler said East Tennessee State University anthropology professor Dr. Lindsey King was instrumental in forming the story booth project and winning the grant that funded it.

Her students will be working in the next few months to record stories and take photos of quilts from designated story collection sites.

The Appalachian RC&D will host the recordings and photo slideshows on its website for the public and will link to video of the recordings. The recordings will be integrated into the Quilt Trail app, available for smartphones.

For the sake of redundancy, the nonprofit plans to compile a collection of materials to donate to the Archives of Appalachia at ETSU.

The Quilt Trail group kicked off the story collecting project in August at the National Quilt Trail Gathering, held in Greene County.

In one of the project's first recordings, Vera Ann Myers, owner of Myers Pumpkin Patch in Bulls Gap, told the story of how she bought 22 quilts belonging to her husband Eldon's late Aunt Frida at an estate auction.

"Remember as you're looking at this quilt that there is no ugly quilt, and I did pick this one particularly because of the holes and the wear on it," Myers told a laughing crowd at the gathering.

After convincing the auctioneer to move the quilts and other belongings into a separate auction lot, Myers said her hope began to falter when someone unexpectedly started bidding against her. When Eldon insisted that she keep bidding, her spirit and enthusiasm were restored.

"Now I own all 22 of these quilts," she said. "And all three boxes of Armstrong treasure that nobody wanted. And the old house without the bathroom."

Wheeler said students will collect quilt stories like Myers' through April, but said their schedules are already full.

"We've got more stories coming in, and I'm out of people, it happened quickly," she said. "It's a big project for them, it's a tremendous amount of work, but they're excited. When you're an anthropology major, this is the sort of stuff you get excited about."

The Appalachian RC&D Council also hosts one or two quilt chartings each year, in which attendees bring family quilts, lay them all out on a bed, and the owner of the top quilt tells a story. Once the story is told, the quilt is folded to the foot of the bed, and the owner of the next quilt down comes up and tells a story.

"You end up with all these beautiful layers of color, and it's very symbolic of putting one story on another story, and those being passed down from the older generations," Wheeler said. "With time, we're swiftly losing those stories, and those lifeways are disappearing."

"We're preserving more than just a craft or works of art, we're also preserving Appalachian history and things that might not otherwise have been saved."

The local Quilt Trail was formed by Appalachian RC&D Council director Roy Settle in the late 1990s. Settle, a board chairman, is still involved in the trail.

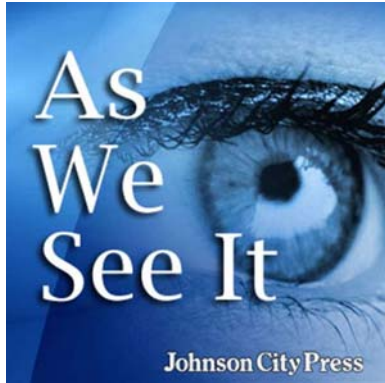
Eighty sites in Washington, Sullivan, Carter, Greene, Johnson and Unicoi counties are stops on the trail, with painted panels, and tourism initiatives in downtown Kingsport and Greeneville include Quilt Trail walks.

Part of the group's programming includes historical site visits. In the most recent, Saturday at Johnson City's Knob Creek Museum, gave attendees behind-the-scenes access to the historical farm.

Another tour will be held April 8 at 10 a.m. at St. John's Mill in Watauga, and one at Homestead Farm in Johnson City has yet to be scheduled.

For more information, visit <http://arcd.org/quilttrail/> (<http://arcd.org/quilttrail/>).

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