

Building Blocks

You can't miss them. Barns, corncribs, businesses, and houses sporting brightly colored quilt blocks as large as 12 feet square. Quilt squares began appearing in Iowa on Grundy County barns in 2004, inviting residents and visitors "to take the road less traveled." Since then, quilt blocks have become a rallying point for community pride and a tourism focus for many counties. Currently 34 Iowa counties have signed on and are in some stage of implementing barn quilt projects, drawing visitors down country roads to experience the beauty of the Iowa countryside.

While Grundy County was the first, Sac County is the most prolific, boasting 55 designs on barns — the largest number for any county in the United States. In addition, Sac County showcases 20 or so quilt blocks on community buildings and an untold number on individual homes. "We thought Barn Quilts were a great way to get people from every part of the county involved. The quilts are a real source of pride," says Sue Peyton, whose son Kevin initiated the Sac Barn Quilts effort for the Herbert Hoover Uncommon Student program, as well as a 4-H leadership project.

The colorful squares are a tourism magnet, says Peyton. "One family from California was so intrigued, they spent two days driving all over the county." Bus tours provide an opportunity to educate visitors about barn architecture, quilt patterns, and agriculture in general, from crops to livestock to wind energy. At the same time, they bring shoppers to local businesses.

The Humboldt County Barn Quilt project has also been embraced countywide. "Every town in the county has a quilt sign, and in 2008 we installed four quilt signs on Highways 3 and 169 where they enter the county," reports John Eveland of the county extension office. — C.B.



COURTESY SUE PEYTON

Installation of a Sac County barn quilt requires the cooperation of volunteers working with the local utility company.

To travel at your own pace, visit county websites for locations and tour maps:

Grundy County: www.grundycountyia.com/Quilt_Website/indexbq.htm

Sac County: www.barnquilts.com

Humboldt County: www.humboldtcountybarnquilts.com