

Wooden quilt is cross-country journey for Seniors' Centre artists



Patches that come together to form a quilt can tell a story, whether a swatch comes from your beloved grandmother's wedding dress, or the blanket that kept your first grandchild warm when they came home from the hospital.

But quilts can tell a story in just about any medium ? as demonstrated last week by woodworkers at the Aurora Seniors' Centre.

A new Wooden Quilt was unveiled at the Seniors' Centre on Thursday morning, a piece that has been a work in progress for more than a year.

The collective work of more than a dozen members of the Centre's woodshop, it has come together as an artistic cross-Canada journey, depicting iconic landmarks as well as powerful vignettes of the Canadian experience, demonstrating a variety of woodworking techniques.

The idea for a wooden quilt was conceived by Danielle Brunet, a retired teacher and Aurora Seniors' Centre member, who also participates in their Quilt and Sew Group. A wooden quilt perfectly melded her two creative passions and it was a challenge that was immediately taken up by the group.

?I thought, ?We can do this,? Brunet recalls of making the pitch to her fellow craftspeople. ?I was sure I could rally the troops and everyone was very excited about the fact we could have something to represent our group and the community. I have been retired (from teaching) since 2015 and I love to paint, I love to sew, I love to quilt, and I knew I just had to have another challenge in my life.?

She read about the woodshop in the Seniors' Centre newsletter and thought she was up to the challenge.

?Meeting all these really talented people and just feeling part of a community here at the Aurora Seniors' Centre is what really enticed me to join,? she says.

Fellow contributors Ana Khorramshahi and Velta O'Leary also revel in the fellowship of the woodshop.

?I have been kind of a DIY person my whole life,? says Khorramshahi, who contributed three squares to the project ? a bear in the snow, the Toronto skyline, and a Mountie depicted with a hockey stick rather than a gun. ?I started to hear about the woodshop and then I learned they had started a Beginners' group and I just loved it.?

O'Leary has been a woodworker since her early 20s after taking courses on the medium throughout high school. She enjoyed building toy boxes for her children and nephews, eventually graduating to furniture building.

"I love the smell of wood," says O'Leary, who describes herself as a "Northern Ontario girl.

"Most of my life was spent fishing, which is near and dear to my family in northern Sudbury," she continues, pointing to squares she created representing fishing and an inuksuk.

Woodshop lead Mel James proudly points out that O'Leary created the wooden frame holding everything in place as well. The finished product is another point of pride for James, not only as an artist who contributed a number of squares himself, but also in seeing the members come together as a whole to do something really special.

(Continues Below Image)



"You have to learn all the tricks of woodworking to be able to do this - you don't do it overnight, and it can be quite challenging and frustrating, but very satisfying," he says. "There were challenges, but they worked on it, and it was great to see them working together and come up with these ideas. They would reach out, badger us because we were all a little slow.

"What is interesting about all of this is woodcarvers by tradition are insular people. If you go around Ontario, you will probably find woodcarvers working in the basement doing birds and the rest of it. [Here] everything is inclusive and it is very important we all get together as an inclusive group."

Insular or not, those who contributed to the quilt were recognized by James, as well as by Mayor Tom Mrakas, at its January 9 unveiling.

?This extraordinary wood-carved quilt created by the ASA's Wood Carvers Group really is a testament to the artistry, dedication and spirit of collaboration that defines Aurora,? said Mrakas. ?With 21 gifted carvers working together to create a piece that celebrates not just Canada's breathtaking landscapes and cherished wildlife, but also the rich and diverse cultural heritage of our nation. I know that a project like this requires vision and I want to thank Danielle for her leadership and initially conceiving this idea. From what I understand, the final product has surpassed all expectations.

?I want to thank Mel, the team's dedicated woodcarver coordinator, for guiding all the carvers, and to Velta for crafting the intricate frame that enhances the beauty of this work. ? Expertise ensured its sturdy construction and Ana K's coordination was key to keeping this ambitious project on track. This quilt is much more than just art, it is a symbol of what we can achieve when we come together as a community. As Mel so eloquently said, it represents Canada, the incredible talents of the members of the Seniors' Centre, and will serve as a centrepiece for pride and inspiration for everyone who walks through these doors.?

By Brock Weir