

Comfort for needy



BRIAN THOMPSON/THE EXPOSITOR

Louise Clarke and Jim Blumer stand by one of their long-arm quilting machines at their Mount Pleasant business, the Red Red Bobbin Quilt Shop, which is hosting its Quilt Clothesline Show and Fabric Garage Sale on July 20 and 21 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Sewing Seeds creates about 100 quilts a year as 'way of giving back'

MICHELLE RUBY
EXPOSITOR STAFF

If the giant red spool at the top of the driveway isn't a clue, the vibrant fabric artwork pinned to the clothesline outside a blond-brick century home on Mount Pleasant Road tells visitors looking for Red Red Bobbin Quilt Shop they've arrived.

The main floor of the 1870s Georgian Italianate beauty has been given over to the shop, a feast for the eyes with more than 1,500 bolts of vivid fabric, endless spools of thread, patterns, notions and

original quilts made by the owners, Jim Blumer and Louise Clarke. There's just enough room for the couple's kitchen table.

"It just works beautifully," said Clarke. "When people come in they just embrace it, too. The house has a good soul."

On July 20 and 21, hundreds of visitors are expected to line the couple's rural road for the eighth annual Quilt and Clothesline Show and Fabric Garage Sale.

More than 100 quilts of all sizes, shapes, colours and styles – some of them for sale – will be pinned to more than 20 clotheslines on the large property.

"It really is magical," said Clarke.

Visitors can stroll the grounds, check out the shop, peruse the bargain fabrics in the garage, and climb

“*Anytime we hear of someone in the community in need, we give them a quilt.*”

Louise Clarke

the red painted stairs to the former servant's quarters now housing "Robin" and "Alice," Blumer and Clarke's Gammill long-arm quilting machines.

Many of the quilts that will be on display, created by Blumer and Clarke, have been borrowed from their owners to be exhibited over the weekend.

But more than 20 quilts offered for sale will help an effort known as

Sewing Seeds continue to grow.

Started by Blumer and Clarke several years ago as a "way of giving back," members of the group – there are currently nine – meet once a week from September to June at the Bellview Community Hall on Tom Street in Brantford, where they make about 100 quilts a year to give to those who need a little comfort.

All the quilts are made from donated fabric scraps and batting and stitched by the volunteers. Fabric, thread and unfinished quilt tops have been donated by people and organizations throughout southern Ontario. When Don Cherry read about the group's work for the armed forces, he sent 10 of his famously flamboyant ties, all autographed, to be used in the quilts.

See **QUILTS** | A2

Local quilts in homes all over the world

QUILTS from AI

More than 600 quilts have been donated to individuals and organizations, including: Quilts of Valour Canada, for returning soldiers; residents of Attiwapiskat First Nation; the Catholic Children's Aid Society of Hamilton; and Brant Family and Children's Services.

"Anytime we hear of someone in the community in need, we give them a quilt," said Clarke.

Last year alone, 115 quilts were given to Brant Family and Children's Services. Sewn to each of them is a large pocket into which volunteers slip a teddy bear or some other personal item.

Clarke said the prices of the Sewing Seeds quilts are kept low

"because we want to move them" and all the proceeds are funnelled back into the effort, mainly to cover the high cost of the batting.

Blumer and Clarke moved to Brantford from Toronto in 2001. They were growing weary of the travelling involved with attending craft shows for their jewelry business.

Clarke was an occasional quilter who dreamed of owning a long-arm machine used to sew together the quilt top, batting and backing into a finished quilt.

In 2008, following Blumer's successful surgery for prostate cancer, the pair took the plunge and bought their first machine and, later, another at a cost Clarke said

compares to a Mercedes.

When they got their first machine, Blumer had never sewn a stitch.

"We made mattress pads for everyone we knew so we could learn how to use the machine and be able to produce flowing, smooth results," he said.

The couple took some quilting classes and opened for business in 2009, offering quilting services. Two years later, with an ever-expanding fabric selection, they opened the quilt shop.

"We were shocked at how well we were received," said Clarke.

Red Red Bobbin stocks fabric that is fun, colourful and contemporary, with Blumer saying the

shop "should reflect the taste of the owners."

The shop draws customers from a two-hour driving radius and their quilts are in homes all over the world.

Red Red Bobbin also offers classes and workshops ranging from beginner to intermediate-plus. The shop, at 495 Mount Pleasant Rd., is open Thursday, Friday and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The Quilt Clothesline Show and Fabric Garage Sale will be held July 20 and 21 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

For more information about Red Red Bobbin and Sewing Seeds or to make a donation, go to redredbobbin.com or call 519-770-3580.