

Evergreen Quilters Guild

By Katie Brunner

I sat in my office, half-dark from dusk and warm in the Boston summer, and joined an online conference room. In the room, ready early, were the kindest faces I'd seen in a long time. And though I knew they would be nice, my heart was beating faster than it had in months.



I wanted to make a good impression.

These Wisconsin-based quilters are not scary. I knew Tracy Reeb, Elisabeth Yogerst, Alice Zeman, Lisa Johnson, and Pat Jacobs were not there to judge me. Despite that, I was very nervous. I was meeting Alice Zeman, a talented artist, contributor to the Evergreen Quilters Guild's donation program, and a personal celebrity of mine.

We were there because fifteen years ago, I received one of Alice's quilts through the program. My primary reason for reaching out was simple: I wanted to thank her for it and write about the inadvertent impact she had on my life. But after learning a little about the group, I found myself wanting to know the folks behind the curtain. Tracy Reeb, Elisabeth Yogerst, and Pat Jacobs are some of those people, and they had a lot to tell me. I would never have predicted most of what I learned on the call; even the scale of the donation program was a revelation.

During the 2024-25 fiscal year, the guild donated 205 pillowcases, 605 placemats, and 451 quilts. They donate to organizations like the Ronald McDonald House; the Golden House, a shelter for battered women and their children; Meals on Wheels; the Freedom House; Saint John's Ministries; among others. But most notably to me, the guild sends quilts and pillowcases to HSHS St. Vincent Hospital in Green Bay, Wisconsin, where I stayed when I was a teenager.

I got sick. It was a difficult time for me and my family. And until I was wheeled into the harshly lit pediatric wing, I didn't know that teenagers were considered pediatric patients. I'm not sure when I thought childhood ended; in hindsight, I was still very much a kid, and I was scared like one.

About halfway through my stay, exhausted from the sticky wires, the beeping, and the bruise-y pain of a long-term IV, a nurse rolled in a cart of blankets. I remember the moment so well I could draw it. I kept that poor nurse in my room for a long time while I considered each quilt carefully, trying to choose one to keep.

Half of the joy of getting a gift with options is picking out your favorite, and they were so beautiful that I had trouble deciding. Eventually, I settled on a large, heavy, blue and cream quilt that I still use every winter. I am in my thirties now, and that quilt has seen half of my life. It was on my bed when I got sick again, and then again, and a couple years ago, again. I've spent hours looking at all the different blocks (I learned on the call that Alice made some quilts, including mine, from community-sourced scraps), and it's given me a place to hide from the rest of the world, where I spend a lot of my time afraid.

That might sound dramatic, but it's true. It's even truer when you're stuck in a hospital, experiencing that fear for the first time.

Being in a hospital is difficult, especially for a kid. People you don't know won't stop touching you, and through no fault of their own, everyone you *do* know can barely stand to look at you. You're desperate for proof that somewhere else exists.

Whether or not they know it, Evergreen is donating much more than quilts: they deliver hope. They remind people that there's more to life than hardship, at a time in their lives when it's hard to see past it.

And so, I think it's understandable that I was nervous to meet Alice. Unsurprisingly, I teared up, embarrassed myself a little, but thankfully, kept it together. I needed to, because I had a mission. I hoped that by writing about the Evergreen Quilters Guild, I could give them back some of the motivation and inspiration they've given to me.

From Tracy, Elisabeth, Alice, Lisa, and Pat, I learned so much about the organization that surprised me. Among other things, like getting a rundown of the donation sites and materials, I learned just how big the Evergreen Quilters Guild is.

These days, there are around 160-170 members. Some are very active, some are part-timers, but the community itself is an incredible thing. I made an observation near the end of our interview: the Evergreen Quilters Guild is like one of their donation quilts, especially one made with scraps of different material.

Tracy agreed, saying, “We do come from all different backgrounds. We’re all different ages, different cities, and even [come from] different states.”

While building a scrap quilt, fabric passes through many hands, and everyone gives their time and material to make something incredible. Evergreen’s members are doing the same thing with the Guild itself. They put in time, energy, and resources to maintain a true community, one that has been running strong for a long time.

If you think about the group like that, like friends building something together, it’s not surprising to learn that the Evergreen Quilters Guild started in someone’s home. Elisabeth told me, “A woman posted a message on a bulletin board in a store in Green Bay and asked if people were interested to quilt. It said, ‘Meet at Doris Buffet’s home on Velp’ and that was the first time there was a meeting.”

Eventually the group got so large that it needed a dedicated meeting space. In the spring of 1981, they met for the first time formally, well on their way to becoming the Evergreen Quilters Guild of today. In 2025, it is so much more than a hodgepodge group of people making art: it’s a quilt, and it’s a family. A welcoming family, at that.

During the call, Alice commented: “A new person can walk in there alone, and somebody will invite them to sit down. That’s the way it is.”

Elisabeth agreed, saying, “...they just embraced me.”

Pat added, “What’s nice, too, is we bounce ideas off each other. Whether it’s a pattern or a color...it doesn’t make any difference.”

Even the leadership structure invites collaboration. Again, like one of their quilts, everything must be stitched together well, or it frays. They try their best to make sure that doesn't happen. For example, in 1987, the Guild began publishing a newsletter to keep members updated. For a group of people in the '80s to think about publishing a newsletter is amazing – before its time, definitely – and it speaks to how intentional they were about supporting their community, even back then. Needless to say, that newsletter is still regularly published.

Even Tracy Reeb, who was President of the Guild during COVID and managed to keep members engaged throughout, began as a loner. During our interview she admitted, “I joined by myself. I had been begging my friends to join, and I just couldn't get them [there]. Finally, I'm like, I'm just joining. I don't care. And I did. I met so many fun and new people, and now fifteen years later, I'm still here.”

Though Evergreen does spearhead a variety of extraordinary donation programs, I think the group's biggest achievement is its community. It's a community that only seems to grow each year and strengthen each time its members meet.

The Evergreen Quilters Guild shines, especially in a little interview with a woman lucky enough to get a piece of it to take home.