

Suburban News

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She answers the call to stitch

Bedspreads add to warmth at Adirondack retreat

by Terra Osterling

Hilton resident Betty Murphy and husband, Jay, were cruising Raquette Lake in the Adirondack Park when they stumbled upon a jewel.

"We came around Long Point and all of a sudden there's this church, this beautiful thing in the middle of nowhere," Betty recalls of their discovery twelve years ago of St. William's on Long Point.

The not-for-profit, non-denominational St. William's on Long Point, Inc. was created in 1993 after the 1890 cedar shake-shingled church and bunkhouse, no longer used by the Franciscan friars, was about to be sold by the local Catholic diocese. Since the site is accessible only by boat, Betty and Jay pulled up to the dock to take a look around.

Betty saw a diamond-in-the-rough. She subscribed to their Preservation Board newsletter and has returned every year since to pray in the chapel and soak up the peace of St. William's. Over time, the foundation has been replaced and the finely stenciled ceiling restored.

"I love St. William's and *I have to go there*," says Betty about the attraction of the lakeside retreat.

It was during her annual visit last August along with her sister, Mary

Lou, when Betty happened to notice 19 Adirondack themed bedspreads on their wish list – one for each bed in the bunkhouse and lodge.

"I sincerely heard this message, as if through the ceiling, (saying) *You can do this.*' And I thought, 'I have a full time job!' Then I heard it again, *'but you can do this.'*"

Indeed, she can and she did. Betty has been sewing all her life, making prom dresses, her own wedding dress, clothes for now grown son Patrick and as a seamstress at Lakeside Hospital in Brockport.

Betty now works as the parish secretary (and sometime-tailor) at St. Leo's the Great Catholic Church in Hilton. Evenings and weekends since late last summer, with a break at the holidays, were spent at her trusty four-decade-old Kenmore sewing machine.

Betty started the project by finding an online retailer selling simple burgundy bedspreads – on the last day of a buy one-get one free sale. When the packages arrived, covering their front porch, husband Jay asked Betty, "Why are you doing this?"

She said her quick answer was, "Look, I firmly believe what it says in the Bible: 'those to whom much is given, much is expected.' I've been given this gift to sew, and I have to share it." Betty also donated all the materials at her own cost, nearly \$800.

Betty's original design became three appliques – a loon for the pillow fold, an image of the unusual church, and a birch log embroidered with St. William's On Long Point, Raquette Lake, NY. And because Betty prayed each time she sat down to work, she also made a small birch log tag embroidered "Created with Love by God and Betty Murphy."

A Kodak firefighter who Betty had met on the public barge ride over to one of St. William's free Thursday evening live music programs pitched in for two more bedspreads so that St. William's would have extras. In all, this amounted to 88 appliques.



St. William's on Long Point on Raquette Lake in the Adirondack Mountains was once a Franciscan Friary. Photo by Dennis Mitchell provided by St. William's staff.

The loon's singular markings are accurately pieced in black gingham, white on black polka-dots, and a subtle black and white tiger stripe – five separate pattern pieces. But how to depict birch bark, the quintessential Adirondack tree that she knew had to be part of this bedspread?

"I don't even know if this stuff exists," Betty recalls thinking.

Betty scoured the fabric aisles at JO-ANN's (Fabric and Crafts) three times searching for birch bark-patterned fabric. On her last pass, at the very end of the last aisle on the bottom shelf, Betty found the last of a bolt that was a perfect match. She says she chuckled, sensing a little help from above, and bought up every last scrap that the retailer could find as far away as their Ohio warehouse.

Every applique and its stabilizer backing were hand-cut by Betty based on her poster board patterns. Earlier this spring, while Jay had rotator cuff surgery, Betty passed the time by cutting out 220 windows (10 on each church applique) with tiny scissors.

Ideally, the words had to be done by an embroidery machine, which Betty didn't own. Patty Ayers, a friend at church, entered her mind with what had become the usual divine nudge.

Not wanting to put her friend on the spot, "Just tell her about it...and don't worry," was the follow up message Betty says she received. Telling Patty about the project led to her inviting Betty for a visit when



Betty Murphy is wrapped up in her work in order to show all three parts of the Adirondack themed appliques she created out of cloth to decorate the coverings. The loon design is shown at left. Photographs by Walter Horylev.

they spent hours poring over the fonts, letter sizes and thread colors available on the embroidery machine. Of course, Patty agreed to embroider the birch logs; 23 in all so Betty could keep one, which amounted to 17,402 stitches on each log.

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Betty Murphy, shown at her sewing machine, spent over 130 hours on the project she undertook to create coverlets for St. William's on Long Point in the Adirondacks. Photography by Walter Horylev.

The call to stitch

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One hundred thirty-one hours and over three miles of thread later, 22 bedspreads were personally delivered by Betty and Mary Lou to St. William's over Memorial Day weekend.

Sandy Monhollen, site manager of St. William's on Long Point, motored over to meet them at the dock. Spotting Betty, Sandy called out her name; Betty, she says, looked skyward.

"You talk to a lot of people and meet some different characters," Sandy says of her work at St. William's. "Betty is a little firecracker, and a quick wit!"

Monhollen says the bedspreads had been on their wish list "*Forever*," since before she and husband Randy took over the May-to-October management of St. William's five years ago. Restoration of the buildings, including shoring up a foundation ready to crumble into Raquette Lake, took priority.

"When you're on a shoestring and rely on volunteers, it's hard to find the funding," Randy Monhollen says of the labor of love that is St. William's on Long Point. He calls Betty's donation "flabbergasting, truly a gift. It makes a homey, welcoming atmosphere for visitors."

"I love them, the stitchery is just beautiful! We fussed over them and made up a bed," says Sandy of first seeing the bedspreads.

Then they showed Betty a token of their gratitude – a boulder painted with a pine tree, a bear and a moose, and inscribed: Betty Murphy, "Super Stitch."

The Monhollens marvel at Betty's dedication, saying "Who knew bedspreads would put us on the map?"

"It was all a joy to do and each step came suspiciously easy," Betty reflects on the intricate work, adding, "I want the focus to be on St. William's because it's such a jewel



Betty displays a picture of the old friary on Raquette Lake, St. Williams on Long Point, now a lodge, compared to her interpretation translated into a cloth appliqué on a bedspread. One of three items with an Adirondack theme on each of the bedspreads she decorated, the other two are a loon and a birch bark cloth with the name and location embroidered on it, Betty made 22 of them. The Parma resident and the secretary of St. Leo the Great Church in Hilton, had been a supporter of the Adirondack church for many years. Patty Ayers, a friend of Betty, did the embroidery for the coverlets. Photograph by Walter Horylev.

... all for my favorite place on earth."

For information on the Raquette Lake retreat center St. Williams on Long Point, visit: <http://www.stwilliamsonlongpoint.org/>