



NEWS RELEASE

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**KNOXVILLE CONVENTION CENTER ADDS 'UNDER TENNESSEE SKIES'
QUILT TO ITS \$1 MILLION ART COLLECTION**

"It all started with one crazy mockingbird."

That's how professional quilter Kathy Drew tells the story of the latest addition to the Knoxville Convention Center's \$1 million permanent art collection. The Village Quilters Guild will officially present the center with an East Tennessee-inspired quilt entitled "Under Tennessee Skies" to kick off the American Quilter's Society(AQS) Quilt Expo at the Knoxville Convention Center on July 21.

The 79-inch by 80-inch quilt, expertly pieced by members of the Tellico Village quilting guild and quilted by Drew on a long-arm quilting machine, took well over 850 hours and almost 17,000 yards of thread to complete. Hanging in the Clinch Avenue glass atrium at the Knoxville Convention Center (KCC), it embodies the rich heritage of the East Tennessee region.

"The plan was to make this quilt uniquely Tennessee, so we decided to incorporate some Tennessee state symbols," said Drew. "It all started with one crazy mockingbird, the state bird." Drew has incorporated such symbols as the zebra swallowtail butterfly, purple iris, passion flower, bobwhite quail, and tulip poplar leaves into the quilt.

The idea began in March 2008 when the KCC signed an agreement with the American Quilter's Society to bring the prestigious Quilt Expo to Knoxville beginning in July 2009. One of only three AQS shows annually, this summer show will attract over 20,000 quilters and quilt enthusiasts from all over the country.

"I have always thought quilting is such an important part of our East Tennessee heritage and that there should be a quilt from this region's creative hands in our KCC collection," said Susan Eaton, assistant

general manager and director of sales and marketing for the Knoxville Convention Center. "When the Village Quilters were in Knoxville for the announcement of the Quilt Expo, I approached Arliss Barber with the idea."

"Each year thousands of people come to East Tennessee to view the mountains and the spectacular fall foliage," said Barber, past president of the Village Quilters Guild. "When the guild decided to undertake this project, the East Tennessee landscape became our inspiration for the quilt."

Guild members selected 20 yards of fabric in 48 different colors and machine pieced them to depict the skies, mountains, foliage, green valleys, lakes and streams of our region. They wove the fabrics together in the French braid style to represent the mountain skyline.

"You'll see the three distinct areas of East Tennessee in the mountain skyline created by the piecing," said Barber, who helped with the piece work. "The Cumberland Plateau is on the left, the lower valley where Knoxville is located is center, and the higher Great Smoky Mountains is on the right." The colors chosen depict the region's fall foliage and green valley, the lakes and mountain streams.

When the pieced top was ready for quilting in February, the guild turned it over to Drew to create the landscape. "The project was a little daunting at first," said Drew. "I tried to talk my way out of it. But when I told my mother about the idea, she began bringing out all these great photos of Tennessee landmarks that were so special to me, and I became driven. There were times I was up for days, stopping only for short naps before starting again."

Drew has quilting in her blood. Her great-grandmother was a quilter, even growing her own cotton and making her own batting, and the tradition has been handed down through the generations. Drew describes quilting as a labor of love.

The fabrics used were so vibrant that traditional outline quilting was not standing out as well as Drew wanted. "That's when I decided to try thread painting," she said. Thread painting is the art of drawing and filling in pictures with colored threads. "I love to draw, but my medium is not pencils. I am much better with thread," said Drew. And the evidence is woven throughout the quilt.

There are two inquisitive raccoons peeking in on the scene, fireflies and ladybugs dotting the trees and an eastern box turtle wandering through the valley. In addition, historic buildings, such as the 1905 Mabe family barn and farmhouse in Corryton and the 1915 Cades Cove

Missionary Baptist Church, are woven into the landscape. Knox County's 1854 Paschal grist mill and the 1870s era DeVault/Corum cabin are also depicted. The oldest building in the project is the 1793 log cabin home of Revolutionary war hero Nicholas Gibbs.

"I began at the bottom, able to see only about 24 inches at a time, and worked my way up the quilt," said Drew. "The problem wasn't where to begin but how to stop. I had so many great images to work with."

The quilt has been donated to the KCC by the Village Quilters Guild. Formed in 1996, the guild has grown to over 250 members from Loudon and surrounding counties. In addition to this project, The Village Quilters Guild recently had a showing of 75 'Challenge' quilts which were made for the Quilts of Valor project and donated to veterans. For more information on the village quilters, see www.villagequilters.com.

The value of the quilt will soon be assessed by a professional appraiser, but local quilters say it will be in the tens of thousands of dollars. Certainly it is a unique and a wonderful example of East Tennessee craftsmanship, tradition and culture to all who visit our Knoxville Convention Center.

The Knoxville Convention Center, managed by SMG, is located in downtown Knoxville adjacent to the Sunsphere. It boasts an 119,922-square-foot exhibit hall, a 27,300-square-foot divisible ballroom and 18 meeting rooms. For more information, visit <http://www.knoxvilleconventioncenter.com>.

Headquartered in Philadelphia, SMG provides management services to over 200 public assembly facilities including arenas, stadiums, performing arts centers, theatres and convention, conference and trade centers. As the recognized industry leader since 1977, SMG provides construction and design consulting, pre-opening services, venue management, sales and marketing and event booking and programming. SMG also offers food and beverage operations through our in house catering company, Savor...catering by SMG, currently servicing 66 accounts worldwide. With facilities across the United States, and in Puerto Rico, Mexico, Canada, Europe and the Middle East, SMG controls over 1.5 million entertainment seats worldwide and manages more than ten million feet of exhibition space.

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Pictured Kathy Drew