



Quilt Shows for Fun and Profit **PART II**

In our last issue, we talked about show planning and preparation to insure financial success. The second part of this article touches on some specific ideas that can increase your guild's revenue.

A dollar here and a dollar there adds up

Fundraising events can enhance your show, but be creative and think "outside the box." Try to find popular ideas, but add your own touch to them. Boutiques featuring items made by guild members are usually financially successful. If your show takes place near a holiday and you are having a boutique, theme the boutique appropriately. Collect boutique items throughout the year at regular guild meetings. Arrange for each member to tag her own items so there is no pricing controversy and everyone shares the labor. Boutique profits are usually split between the guild and the guild member; make sure everyone knows what the guild's "cut" will be from the outset.

A quilter's yard sale not only gives members an opportunity to clean out items they no longer need, but is often more financially successful than a boutique. In most cases, these items are completely donated so the yard sale is 100% profit for the guild. Irene Warman of Stoughton, Massachusetts, coordinated her guild's recent biennial quilter's yard sale, always a major draw at the quilt show. "Guild members really take advantage of this oppor-

tunity to clean house," says Irene. "My garage was full of bins of donated goods, which filled my husband's pick-up truck when I brought everything over on show setup day. We made hundreds of dollars from the yard sale." Irene notes a key to the yard sale's success is pricing items to sell. "The guild members didn't want these items back and we didn't want to have to cart them home again, so the prices were really low. You know the saying, 'one person's trash is another's treasure.' Stuff flew out of there. And a side benefit of the yard sale is now members have room for new supplies and fabric!"

Attract crowds

While some shows do not feature vendors, most do. The promise of a good shopping spree entices more visitors to your show. Many guilds plan their vendor fee structure to cover the rental costs of the show site. Choosing a variety of vendors benefits both visitors and the vendors themselves; make sure your publicity includes information about your vendors. Provide the vendors with details of your show to include on their websites well in advance of the date. Treat your vendors well by helping them with their set-up and take-down, providing breaks during the hours of the show, and having a hospitality room set up where they can go for a few minutes of respite and a brownie or two...your vendors will want to come back year after year.

Susan Muldowney, of the Miami Valley Quilters' Guild, in Dayton, Ohio, explains their show features a nationally known teacher (usually booked two years in advance of the show).

Fees for classes and lectures by the teacher cover the costs, plus bring a modest profit for the guild. However, you don't have to spend a lot of money to bring in a big name quilter. One guild elects a "featured quilter," someone who has been particularly active in their group. A special exhibit of the featured quilter's work is the capstone event of their annual show. Or, your guild may be able to find a local quilter who has a trunk show you can feature.

Contact your town's historical society to see if they have a textile collection you can exhibit (and feature in your publicity). Offering guided "tours" of the show exhibit where a "docent" gives background information on the displayed quilts are good ways to draw non-quilters to the show. If you have a guild where several members make wearable art, consider having a moving fashion show through the quilt exhibit. Highlighting this event in your publicity will help you draw even more visitors, thus raising your revenues.

Raffles

Guilds with regular quilt shows usually coordinate the drawing of a raffle quilt with their show. Tickets are sold for a year or more in advance, all the while promoting the show. "We have our biennial raffle quilt tickets for sale at our show. The funds raised provide money for the guild, but we also choose a non-profit social service organization to receive a donation from those revenues," says Kathleen Ackerson, of the Shenandoah Valley Quilters Guild, in Harrisonburg, Virginia. Be sure to investigate whether your town requires purchase of a raffle permit.

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An excellent revenue source is a Chinese raffle, featuring baskets of items solicited from manufacturers and donations from local businesses and guild members. Where there is minimal cost involved in the items to be raffled, the income is all "gravy." Suzanne Brown of the Friendship Star Quilters in Gaithersburg, Maryland, says one of her guild's most successful raffles was a donated featherweight sewing machine. "Sales of tickets for the machine were fast and furious," Suzanne said. "As the show was winding down and getting close to the drawing, people were buying last minute chances left and right." Every biennial quilt show hosted by the Thimbles and Friends Quilt Guild in Abington, Massachusetts has featured a Husqvarna-Viking sewing machine donated by one of their vendors in compensation for a free-of-charge vendor space and show book advertising. The machine raffle has brought many hundreds of dollars into the guild's treasury with no cost except the printing of the tickets.


Small quilt auctions are another money-maker for your guild. Guild members can be challenged to create and donate small quilts; you can even have a workshop during the year specifically for this purpose. Silent auctions are popular, or you can have a live auction as the culmination of your event, thus generating lots of fun and excitement. Most guilds make several hundred dollars off small quilt auctions and it's "free money" because there is no cost to the organization.



Be patient, be happy

A guild of 200 members is not necessary to put on a successful show; a small guild can do it just as effectively as long as they work well together and have good, organized leadership.

Karen Gray of the Merrimack Valley Quilter's Guild in Plaistow, New Hampshire, says "We've had shows that were a bust and shows that were awesome. If something doesn't work one year, it's left out the following year." Don't become wedded to ideas that might be too labor-intensive with little financial reward just because "that's the way we've always done it."

Brenda Jeschke of the Quilters' Guild of East Texas, located in Tyler, counsels it may be several years before you note a profit on your quilt show. "Sometimes it takes some time to find out what works and what doesn't work for your group or in your area. Additionally, building the reputation of your show can take a while, so don't go into the planning stages without long-range projections," Brenda advises. "The show should be fun...we aren't performing brain surgery. We want to make a profit, but don't take it too darn seriously." 



NQA member Linda Newberry is an award-winning quilter who has been teaching quilting classes for more than twenty years. She currently offers two trunk show/lectures: "America Through the Eyes of the Quiltmaker" and "Getting in Touch with Your Inner Stash." In 2007 she will present a new trunk show, "Honoring Our Ancestors: Genealogy Through Quilting." She has researched the development of the American textile industry and her master's thesis focused on Baltimore Album quilts as manifestation of early-19th century American patriotism. Linda lives with her husband, David, and their cat, "Flea Biscuit," in Whitman, Massachusetts. They are avid New England Patriots, Boston Red Sox, and AVP Pro Volleyball fans and love to travel.

Note: information for this article was collected via an email survey by this author of 150 quilt show organizers in the United States and Canada in April 2006.