

Computers and quilting are a perfect match for prolific artist

By Jodi Schneider McNamee
Correspondent

When Mike Denton, featured quilter in the 2018 machine quilter showcase, retired in 2009 he decided to make up a list of activities he wanted to do to keep busy.

“There’s about, oh, 60 things listed — golf, hiking, boating, painting, reading, camping — they go on forever.”

And one just happened to be fabric arts. And his wife, Sue, a longtime quilter, had purchased a long-arm quilting machine in 2006.

“The machine kind of became a coat rack for a while because it intimidated her, and she’s not very technical,” Denton said. “Neither of us knew how to use it, but one of us was going to do it. So, I began quilting my own quilts.”

His very first experience with sewing was on his mother’s treadle machine when he was in high school. And then again in the Navy when he bought a sewing machine to stitch his patches onto his uniform.

In 2009 Denton took his first quilting class at Stitchin’ Post. And he was hooked.

He fired up the long-arm machine and went to work on his initial quilts, made for charitable causes.

“When I was first learning to quilt, I practiced on quilts from the Mormon church that were provided to me by Laura Simmons in Sisters,” Denton said. “Then, the Quilts-for-Kids were provided by Linda Griepentrog in Bend. I have quilted several quilts for the Presbyterian Church in Redmond, and about 40 quilts for chemo cancer patients in Bend and Redmond.”

After practicing by tracing pantograph designs onto charity quilts, he quilted his first quilt, and then his second. His first was 8-1/2 feet by 8-1/2 feet, with 36 blocks!

Denton likes to think of himself as a computer whiz, so in 2011, he upgraded to a computerized long-arm machine.

“I got my first computer in 1981. I love computers and I love the long-arm, and, poof, it was a match made in heaven,” he said.

Denton has been keeping count of his quilts since 2011.

“I had to start keeping records, because you have to pay taxes on your income,” he said.

By the end of June, he was up to 850 quilts. And 200 went to charities and family.

Denton finds joy in troubleshooting and repair, especially with quilts.

“I work on a wide variety of quilts,” he said. “I get charity quilts, first-quilts from new quilters, well-pieced quilts from experienced quilters, and not-so well-pieced quilts from a variety of quilters, including some who think they are experienced quilters.”

All the quilting Denton does on any quilt is the result of a computer-guided design that guides the machine while it’s stitching.

“I like solving the challenges that arise when trying to complete my main goals of making the quilt square and flat, and I like designing and digitizing new quilting designs,” Denton explained. “I take almost everything that comes through the door. I’ve only rejected two quilts.”

“Each year when quilts are registered, the person putting the quilt in the show indicates who quilted the quilt; we are never surprised by the quantity of quilts that have Mike Denton listed as the quilter,” said Jeanette Pilak, executive



PHOTO BY JODI SCHNEIDER MCNAMEE

Mike Denton has made hundreds of quilts since getting started in 2009.

director of Sisters Outdoor Quilt Show (SOQS). “Mike has been a volunteer for the Sisters Outdoor Quilt Show and Quilter’s Affair for at least a decade.

“He sets up tents, tables, and our volunteer check-in station and information booth early on the morning of quilt show day. All during Quilt Week (July 9-13) he volunteers close to eight hours a day at Quilter’s Affair — the classes and workshops out at Sisters High School which are produced by Stitchin’ Post. Basically, we couldn’t produce Quilt Show Day without

Mike’s efforts,” she added.

Mike prefers the traditional style of quilting with symmetrical designs where the points match.

“I have about 2,000 digitized designs, so I can provide a variety of nature designs or shapes for the customer to choose from.”

Denton’s favorite quilt is a kaleidoscope quilt that he completed in a class at Stitchin’ Post, taught by Judy Johnson in 2012.

Denton noted, “It’s my favorite because I thought I did a really great job on my third quilt.”

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Volunteers! Please join us at the **Thank You Reception** Tues., July 24, 5:30-8pm at Three Creeks Distribution Center. RSVP to info@soqs.org by July 10 or call 541-549-0989.

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