

# Tonye Belinda Phillips: A local treasure

By Katy Yoder  
Correspondent

What do words like whimsical, abstract, bright, playful, and unexpected all have in common?

For Tonye Belinda Phillips it's how she describes her motivation and design for this year's Sisters Outdoor Quilt Show (SOQS) raffle quilt. Phillips realized a long time ago that yielding to constraints about making everything match doesn't work for her. She's proven over her quilting career that her instincts are correct.

The raffle quilt, "My Kind of Town," has a joyful musicality bubbling with notes of purples, shades of chartreuse greens, yellows, and sunset orange. Orbs bounce across the rooftops of tall, slender houses reaching towards mountain skies. Inspired by this year's theme, it's a homey, happy place full of possibility and new ways of combining color and texture.

Since she's this year's featured quilter, it was a natural decision for show organizers to ask Phillips to contribute her second raffle quilt for the Sisters Outdoor Quilt Show.

"It was perfect for me to do it," said Phillips from her home in Camp Sherman. "I love using fabrics that many people wouldn't think of using together ... colors, prints, textures, just really mixing things up... we call them scrappy quilts. The idea came into my head to do something that's a combination of whimsical, abstract, bright, playful and unexpected."

When people look at her designs, including this year's raffle quilt, Phillips gets comments like, "I'd never use those fabrics together." But when they understand how it all works together and creates a cohesive image that's pleasing to the eye, she sees their smiles as they expand their design concepts and step out of comfortable, predictable combinations.

"It shows you can be free to mix it up," she said. "I've lived in the same place for 50 years, but I like to be spontaneous and I'm up for most things. I'm active and like change even though it might not look that way. A lot of people get bogged down in everything having to match. I'm the opposite and it works for me. It's a personal thing.

If you're loving it that's what's most important. It's a process to learn how all those things go together. You must trust your intuition; that's the hang-up for some people."

Dawn Boyd, SOQS executive director, enjoyed hearing positive reactions from folks when she took the raffle quilt to an event in Salem.

"Everyone loved the quilt, especially the detail. Every house color block is differently quilted. They loved the back of the quilt as much as the front, because it was another amazing piece of quilt art. The back is adorable. It's back at the Stitchin' Post now. The raffle tickets are \$5 each and can be purchased at the Stitchin' Post or on our website SOQS.org," said Boyd.

Phillips' relationship with SOQS goes back to its founder, Jean Wells Keenan. She remembered when Wells was a home economics teacher at Beaverton High School in the late 1960s. Tonye moved to Central Oregon in 1969 and then to Camp Sherman in 1972. She began working for Black Butte Ranch and reconnected with Wells who moved with her family to the Ranch. From the beginning, Phillips found Wells exceptionally supportive and encouraging.

Phillips' mother taught her stitching in Portland. She was always working on knitting or crocheting projects.



"I didn't learn to quilt until I took my first class in 1992 from Jean working on a sampler quilt with several blocks and different techniques at Stitchin' Post," said Phillips.

But she yearned to learn hand quilting and applique — anything done by hand she loved.

Seeing Phillips' skill and unique use of color, texture and prints, Wells asked her to be a teacher at the show's educational program Quilter's Affair in the late 1990s.

"I've been teaching ever since," Phillips said.

Phillips' first time as the SOQS featured quilter came in the late 1990s as well.

"There's special exhibits around featuring a local quilter and their body of work. I'm the Queen for the Day," she said with a laugh.

Since her first stint as featured quilter, Phillips wrote a book, "Hand Appliqued Quilts - Beautiful Designs and Simple Techniques." It's been republished in soft cover and is available at Stitchin' Post.

"I've also gotten back into hand embroidery and decorative stitching and working with wool fabrics with texture," she said. "I teach a lot with Sue Spargo, using wool and cotton hand applique and decorative stitching and embroidery in bright whimsical designs and texture and colors. We teach once a year at Stitchin' Post and in Santa Barbara in September at the Santa Barbara Quilting Retreats."

Phillips has also designed several of her own patterns, which are available at

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— Tonye Belinda Phillips

Stitchin' Post.

"I don't have a website anymore, and am focused in Sisters," she said. "My husband and I travel a lot and I take my work with me sailing and traveling. I took my knitting with me backpacking last summer off the McKenzie Pass with our kids to Scott Mountain. I always take projects with me wherever I go. That's the beauty of handwork."



PHOTO BY PAIGE VITEK

2020 raffle quilt, "My Kind of Town" by Tonye Phillips, quilted by Laura Simmons.

JEAN WELLS

Featured Local Artist

Jean incorporates themes inspired from nature, and enjoys working intuitively — letting each design take on a life of its own. Stop by the gallery to experience her amazing quilts in person.

On display July 8th-11th & July 15th-18th.

Gallery Hours: Wed.-Sat., 11 a.m.-4 p.m. • 303 W. Hood Ave., Sisters • 541-549-4994 • theclearwatergallery.com