

Flonnie's Prize-Winning Quilts

Eighty-nine-year-old Flonnie Webb Stephens brought home the apples and the dumplin's Saturday from the Appalachian Dumplin' Festival last weekend in Winfield — three trophies, seven ribbons: three blue, two red and two white.

Two of the blue ribboned quilts were made after Mrs. Stephens had celebrated her 89th birthday and spent several weeks in bed with flu complications earlier this year! There were times during that period when she thought she would never again be able to do the appliquéing for another quilt.

“I feel so blessed to have the health to do this,” she said, “and so appreciative of the recognition for all the tedious work.”

The seven quilts represented hand-quilted, machine-quilted, and painted categories. Their subjects included white doves of peace, official state birds and flowers, wildflowers of America, Tennessee dogwoods, and Roses of Summer.

Mrs. Stephens says that she started making the quilts as a hobby after she retired in 1977 at the age of 68. She needed something to keep her busy and keep her mind active when the weather outside would not permit her to do her usual vegetable and flower gardening. She also loves to feel she has accomplished something. And like most people as they grow older, she wanted to leave something of herself to her family.

In between tending her lawn and her garden, Mrs. Stephens has made more than 30 adult-sized quilts, at least 20 crib quilts, and several doll quilts. Most of them have already been handed down to her four daughters and eight grandchildren.

When asked if the arm load of prizes has inspired her to make more quilts, she replied that she had already planned to make more as soon as the weather forces her to stay indoors, but she has never made a quilt with the intention of entering it into a contest.

She especially loves to do the hand-stitched appliquéing, and she enjoys the embroidering also. But she welcomes her daughters' help in selecting the fabric, cutting the many quilt pieces, or tracing the designs for her tedious handwork. She gets a lot of satisfaction from seeing each



block finished with its appliqués or embroidery, and then the bigger thrill of seeing the whole quilt when she sews the blocks together on her trusty Nechhi sewing machine.

Mrs. Stephens learned her skills almost 75 years ago from her Oneida High School home economics teacher, Ms. Harrington. But she learned quilt making in school only because she was not interested in watching her own mother make quilts.

“She would make quilts to keep us warm, not for decoration or heirlooms. She pieced and quilted beside an old stove, using only the light from an oil lamp or the winter sun,” Mrs. Stephens recalled from 80 years ago.

So, when Old Man Winter comes, we know somebody will be mighty busy as she sits in front of her TV watching CNN news. That is, until Monday night wrestling — and that’s enough to stop the work of even the most devoted quilt maker!