

Editor's Note

Peter Southorn, M.D.

It's our privilege to put out this Newsletter together. In doing so we are in debt to and thank its contributors. Reading it, I think, gives one a sense of pride in being associated with our department. The ongoing viability of this publication depends on our staying in touch with your thoughts, reminiscences, or whatever. We really hope to hear from you and at the same time wish you a wonderful 2008.

A Stitch in Time

Renee Caswell, M.D., Arizona



Dr. Renee Caswell

For me, quilting is not about making "blankets," but is a creative outlet that balances my life as a Mayo anesthesiologist with my artistic side. I have always considered myself creative and crafty. Growing up on a farm in Minnesota, we learned to make the things we needed since we could not afford to buy

them. I began sewing clothes as a teenager and even made some quilts in high school and college. In 1984, I took my first quilting class and learned traditional techniques for hand piecing, appliqué, and quilting. Next, I took classes in newer techniques including rotary cutting, strip piecing, and machine quilting. Medical school, residency, and two children limited my free time, but I continued to do some quilting throughout those years.

In the past 9 years, I have spent an increasing amount of time in the quilting arts. Attending international quilting shows opened my mind to the incredible creativity, artistry, and advanced techniques used by quilters from around the world. Each year I learn new things and expand my skills. In recent years, I have started designing my quilts rather than follow-

ing someone else's pattern. As my quilting has expanded, so has my fabric stash. I also continue to invest in a variety of specialized tools and other types of equipment. In fact, when I had outgrown my small quilting room and my fabric had metastasized all over the house, my husband, Steve, and I decided to build onto our house so that I could have a larger studio with more storage. We also wanted a large enough space so that several people could work on projects at the same time. This was especially important as both of my daughters have their own sewing machines and we enjoy doing projects with friends and visitors. We also included comfortable chairs for the "dads" so that the whole family could hang out together.

My new quilt studio is one of the best rooms in the house. It is comprised of two sewing cabinets, an 8 foot by 8 foot felt design wall, a cutting and ironing area, a built in light box, a quilting/design library, tall display walls, and well planned storage. We also included large windows for daylight and an incredible six-tiered lighting system for specific tasks. Steve was able to accommodate all my needs and more in the new studio space. It is one of the many advantages of being married to a custom home builder! Since any self-respecting anesthesiologist must be more than a little compulsive, my fabric storage systems reflect my need for some order in the chaos. Fabrics get folded and "filed" by color and type.

When I am working on a project, I can pull out all the appropriate drawers to choose from. In the midst of a project, my studio will often look like a "fabric bomb" has exploded. Quilting is like painting with fabric, and my fabric drawers are my palettes.

Since I now have such an incredible work space, I have been able to produce and complete more quilts than ever in the past. My quilts have been displayed at Mayo Clinic on four different occasions as part of the Humanities in Medicine rotating art displays.



1. Quilts on display at Mayo Clinic Arizona; 2. Mayo Clinic Quilt; 3. Mayo Clinic Quilt detail; 4. Blue Collection Quilt; 5. Renee free motion quilting the Mayo Clinic Quilt; 6. Studio at Dr. Caswell's home.



The Purple Quilt



Fall Leaves Quilt

I have also had quilts in the Arizona Quilters Guild Show and the International Quilt Festival juried competition in Houston, Texas. I do not specifically create quilts for competition, but rather what strikes my fancy or interest at any one time.

After conceiving the idea for a group quilt to commemorate Mayo's 20th anniversary in Arizona, I have spent the past 2 years working almost exclusively on that project. A local quilt artist was commissioned, and she and I led the project and did the majority of the design and construction of the quilt. Several Mayo employees helped with the project. I personally worked over 1,000 hours on this piece of art - nights, weekends, and vacations. As a result of our labors, this spectacular piece of art will be on permanent display at Mayo Clinic in Arizona. Now that the Mayo Clinic Quilt is completed, I am back to designing and making my own quilts just for "fun" again.