



Heritage Village Fiber Arts Building – a Dream Come True

[Tyler County Booster](#), 3-27-14, 10B.

Yvonne Goss cut the yellow ribbon last Saturday, March 22, dedicating the new Fiber Arts Building at the Heritage Village Museum, realizing another part of a dream come true. The ribbon and ceremonial scissors were supplied by Tyler County Chamber of Commerce President Amy Bythewood. She and her husband Mayor Ben Bythewood represented both the chamber and the city.

At the beginning, Tyler County Heritage Society President Fred Sullivan set the stage with a few snippets of history. Huntley Kenesson led a prayer. Then Sullivan thanked Christine Moor Sanders for the vision, perseverance and some arm twisting without which, he said, “None of this would have been possible.”



Fiber Arts Building Ribbon Cutting—was held during Dogwood Festival of the Arts events out at Heritage Village Museum.

In an aura of gratitude, Sanders recalled a bit of ancient and dear history, telling how the Tyler County Heritage Society had raised \$125,000 in 45 days to purchase the Heritage Village Museum and the Pickett House in 1987. Thrilled to be there, Sanders felt honored that her successors have forwarded the dream by completing the beautiful new Fiber Arts Building.

Later in the day, Sanders said, “It was God’s doing all the way.” Dear thoughts on decades of hard work and fun, she hopes and prays this God-given dream – and dream come true – will

continue, the vision reinvigorated and the board energized to “even greater possibilities in the future.”

Sullivan continued the building dedication with a hearty thanks to Durwood Ling and to “Mr. and Mrs. Heritage Village Museum of Fiber Arts” themselves, Jesse and Georgia Collins, the premier village weaver and spinner. Sanders noted that the Collins had been there from the beginning, sharing the dream.

Sullivan thanked TCHS past President Yvonne Goss who was dedicated to getting the Arts Building built, and he thanked Charles Smith and John Gazzaway, and Leane Monk and East Texas Home Health for the flower beds.

Goss stepped forward and thanked the sub-contractors including K. Thornton for staining the doors and windows, Jimmy Owen for the A/C, Loyd Prather for carpentry and roofing, Ted Borowski for electrical, Ronda Knighten for installing insulation on the ceiling, Ray Russell for the retaining wall and drainage, Lynn Barnes for plumbing, Joseph Boyd and John Gazzaway for carpentry, Johnny Dees for spraying polyurethane, and Daniels Floor Shine for putting two coats on the floor.

Goss thanked Lynn Rhodes, president of the Sassie Scrappers, Connie Loveless, president of the Spinners and Weavers, and Ofiera Gazzaway, Director of the Heritage Village. There were others to thank, as the list grows without end.

Goss was chair of the Fiber Arts Building construction committee with Jesse and Georgia Collins, Keelin Parker, and Charles Smith, about which Goss said, “This building is a permanent reminder that dreams can come true. To those who had the dream and would not let it die. To the directors who supported the project. I have endured much laughter over the very idea of building by committee. All I have to say is, ‘Look!’”

A lover of the arts, author, painter, and sculptor, Sanders came to Woodville over 35 years ago and built her home deep in the Harmony woods. Reflecting, she said, “At some point I discovered that if God is behind the vision, and you are able to communicate the vision to others, it will happen.” To understand the magnificence of this day, we need to look briefly back in time.

Clyde Gray and his wife Lillian (known as “Bill”) moved to Woodville in the 1940s and started an art gallery in the 1950s that evolved into a museum called the Heritage Gardens. In agreement with the Tolars, the historical Tolar Cabin was moved in 1965 to the Gardens from Hillister. In 1968, Gray acquired the Midway School House, which became the Picket House. In 1970, he changed the name of the whole to Heritage Village. When Jack Whitmeyer came to help in 1972, the two men concocted several publicity stunts.

Gray, Whitmeyer and some concerned citizens formed the TCHS. Yet, in the 1980s, the Grays’ health deteriorated. Some people from Waco wanted to buy the antiques, yet because many of the gifts to the Village had no documentation, there was little proof of the donors’ desires for the “gifts” to remain in Tyler County.

In the hot summer of 1987, the 45-day \$125,000 deal became a real challenge.

Sanders’ diehard determination grew. “I just believed it was the right thing to do. The Village needed to stay in Tyler County.” She knew God was with them.

Sullivan crafted a thermometer on the courthouse square, raising the red line as money came in. Their motto was “Have a Heart, Save the Village.”

News spread. Cheerleaders at football games cheered for the Village and passed cans. News and television stations in Beaumont and Houston reported. Tyler County rallied around God’s vision for the Village.

Some could not give money, but could make tamales that were sold at the local newspaper office. Quilts were raffled. So many did so much.

“Everything we touched just turned to gold,” said Sanders.

As the deadline arrived, the TCHS had \$115,000, and a lawsuit threat over the parking lot conditions almost botched the deal. But Sanders twisted some arms. The Grays capitulated, lowered the price, and TCHS won.



Georgia and Jesse Collins at the early stages of the building

Fast forward several decades amid continual additions, the TCHS owns and operates the Village and the Picket House, the latter a part of the historical “education” required in the legal language. Yes, when we are eating – “boarder house style” – we eat as they did back then. A fine education and most delicious, too: please, return your dishes to the kitchen, and receive your diploma.

As visitors enter the Fiber Arts Building atrium, you will see two large wood-inlaid frames made by Jack Whitmeyer, the first mover and shaker of the Heritage Village. The color wood mosaic illustrates several kinds of quilting patterns. In the center between the two frames is a plaque that Sullivan presented that fittingly dedicates the building in honor of Jesse and Georgia Collins, Durwood and Estelle Ling, and Jack and Manie Whitmeyer. To the left, the Sassie Scrappers quilt and display their arts, and to the right, the Spinners and Weavers are at work.

On the following day, Sunday, the annual Dinner on the Grounds proceeded with live music and home cooking – right on schedule. Then the Western Weekend will be followed by the Dogwood Festival, as Tyler County relives its history.

So, all the TCHS board, the Chamber of Commerce, and the city and county invite you to come join in this miraculous living adventure (Heritage-Village.org).
Come and see!

www.Heritage-Village.org



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