

Quilt Divas Inspired by Women's Work

By Lori Sonken

The Quilt Divas, fiber artists who meet monthly in Ithaca's Old Jailhouse to critique artwork, are creating a hanging art piece for auction, with proceeds supporting Dining for Women (DFW), a non-profit organization that raises funds to empower women worldwide.

"This is going to be a piece of artwork made up of nine individual banners that range from six to 12 inches in width, and are approximately 36 inches long," explains Sally Dutko, a member of both local groups. "Each of the banners represents one of the organizations, such as Bead for Life, Heifer International and the One Acre Fund, that DFW supports."

Throughout North America, including Ithaca, DFW chapters meet monthly to share meals and pool the money that they otherwise would have spent dining out to fund a program the national organization has identified as meriting support.

"I go to the meetings and come out so inspired by not only the programs and what our dollars are doing, but also by the women in Ithaca getting together," Dutko says.

Donna Faivre-Roberts, another member of both organizations, agrees. "We don't just go and eat, visit, write a check and go home. We always have a great program to learn about the foundation we are sponsoring that month," she says. "We hear heartfelt stories, and it is often very emotional. When I am at a Dining For Women meeting I can



Photo by Lori Sonken

This hanging artwork created by the Quilt Divas will be auctioned off to benefit the efforts of Dining for Women.

feel so much energy in the room and I know there is power in numbers and that we can and do make a difference," says Faivre-Roberts.

About eight of the 14 Quilt Divas are making the banners for the art piece they expect to complete this summer.

"On my panel, I have photos of women and the beads that I have bought from Bead from Life," Dutko says. Made from recycled

paper, the beads are sold by a Uganda-based group to support families.

Faivre-Roberts' panel incorporates the DFW logo of a dinner plate resting on crossed fork and spoon to form the international symbol of woman. She uses fabric printed with the map of the world to make the plate, and a spoon and fork from antique children's toy dishes.

"I think Ithaca has one of the most dynamic [DFW] chapters in the entire organization and that is because of Miriam Bisk, our tireless leader. I have never ever met a woman with so much passion when it comes to helping women," Faivre-Roberts says.

A child of Holocaust survivors, Bisk started Ithaca's chapter three years ago after watching a segment on the "Today Show". DFW's mission "spoke to my concerns about women in general and those who live in extreme poverty, despair and fear, in particular," she says. She knew she could not stand idle. In less than three years the Ithaca chapter has raised more than \$40,000 for 32 organizations, Bisk says. About 30 women attend each meeting and they raise about \$900 per meeting.

Not all the women making the art piece are DFW members but they support its mission. A widow, Elsie Dentes says she is not in the position to give money but she is donating her time. She likes Dining for Women because, "they are not just throwing money at the problem." Dentes' banner depicts the One Acre Fund.

"What I like about them is their philosophy of giving a fishing pole instead of fish," she says. The One Acre Fund trains people to maximize their farming operations by providing tools, teaching efficient farming practices and helping the farmers market their crops.

The Quilt Divas' fabric art piece will be auctioned in the fall after touring several DFW chapters around the country, Bisk says.