Inspired by author Suzi Parron (Barn Quilts and the American Quilt Trail Movement), Ashtabula County fabric quilters Kathy McCarty and Chris Angerman knocked on doors and asked questions until they assembled a team of residents who share their passion for old barns, quilts and their stories.

This steering committee formed the Ashtabula County Barn Quilt Trail in the spring of 2014. The trail meshes perfectly with the county’s Covered Bridge Trail and provides tourists yet another reason to leave the highway and seek out the rural treasures of Ohio’s largest county.

Barn quilts are quilt patterns painted on signboard and mounted on barns or other rural structures. The barn quilt phenomenon got its start in southwest Ohio. While it has spread to dozens of other Ohio counties and inspired a few attempts in Ashtabula County, there was no concerted effort until the duo of quilters caught the vision.

Ashtabula County’s Barn Quilt Trail will have at least a dozen quilts by the end of 2014. These quilts help drive tourism into rural areas and give cottage industries relatively inexpensive exposure.

In the process, the stories behind the county’s barns and farms are being preserved, and buildings that were once neglected are getting a fresh coat of paint and new lease on life.

Photos: Chris Angerman and Kathy McCarty (right) are quilters who co-founded the Ashtabula County Barn Quilt Trail. They stand with the Farm Bureau barn quilt that is at the entrance to the Ashtabula County Fairgrounds. Inset: The barn quilt at Blakeslee Log Cabin barn, Plymouth Township.
Terry and Glenda Lowe first vacationed in Ashtabula County in 1973. During a return trip in 2004, the Northern California residents began thinking about the county as a good retirement location. The great real estate values helped seal the deal for them.

“A lot of it was affordability,” says Glenda. “Here was a 100-acre farm that we liked for the same price we’d pay for a little two-bath, three bedroom home on a city lot in California.”

The couple put down roots in Monroe Township, remodeled the 1850 farmhouse that was on the property, converted the old farm to hay and alpacas and raised the roof on an old chicken coop to create a gift shop. Their Ramblin Rose Alpaca Farm has become a tourist destination. The couple’s enthusiasm for the county spread to their son, who lives just down the road from them.

“You can get so much more for your money here,” says Glenda.

Ashtabula County real estate is a bargain when compared to neighboring counties, as well. Prices in Lake County, to the west, are at least 20 percent higher for a comparable property, say Ashtabula County real estate professionals. And compared to Geauga County, the price differential can be 50 percent or more.

The countryside of Ashtabula County provides a range of housing options, from 19th-century farmhouses to 21st-century housing developments and private-lake communities.
OR CLOSE TO URBAN SERVICES...

For those who seek the convenience of city or suburban living, there is a wide range of both rental and owner-occupied properties in Conneaut, Geneva, Ashtabula and the county’s seven villages.

About two-thirds of the county’s residents live north of Interstate 90, which cuts a swath across the northern section of the county. This makes Ashtabula, Conneaut or Geneva an ideal location for those who commute to work in Cuyahoga, Lake or Erie, Pa., counties.

Many of the neighborhoods in Conneaut and Ashtabula are near Lake Erie; Ashtabula Harbor neighborhoods are within walking distance of Walnut Beach, while those to the south are near Indian Trails Park. Most retail is located along U.S. Route 20, which bisects the county’s three cities. A hospital is located in each city, as are medical offices, pharmacies and specialized care.

Several high-rise apartment buildings are in Ashtabula and provide carefree housing for the elderly and disabled, and there are several assisted living centers in each city. The county’s villages strike a balance between convenience and country living. Well-established villages like Jefferson and North Kingsville offer diamonds in the rough, renovated 19th- and early 20th-century housing and recent builds. Lots are generally commodious with plenty of room for a garden and other outdoor-living amenities.

Townships offer diversity of housing options and services; from the high-density, post-World War II neighborhoods of Ashtabula Township to the secluded country getaways of Rome, Richmond and New Lyme townships. And whether home is in Ashtabula, Kingsville or Williamsfield township, major highways, medical care, parks and recreation are nearby.

Real Estate Trends, Ashtabula County

<table>
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<th>Jan.-June 2013</th>
<th>Jan.-June 2014</th>
<th>Change</th>
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<tr>
<td>No. of sales</td>
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<td>Average days on Market</td>
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<td>+8 %</td>
<td>-2%</td>
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The first cabin in what would become Ashtabula County was built near Lake Erie by the survey party of The Connecticut Land Company. More than 200 years later, the southern shore of Lake Erie remains a popular option for both year-around and vacation-home owners.

Lakefront residential properties are concentrated in three areas: Conneaut to North Kingsville; the west side of Ashtabula and all of Saybrook Township; and Geneva Township/Geneva-on-the-Lake. Very little undeveloped, residentially zoned land remains on the shoreline, making the purchase of an existing lakefront home a sound investment, both financially and for the pleasures of lakefront living.

Erosion issues are most evident along Route 531 in Saybrook and Geneva townships, where the phenomenon has threatened the highway. The Ohio Department of Natural Resources, in partnership with the Office of Coastal Management, Division of Wildlife and Division of Geological Survey has created a Lake Erie Shore Erosion Management Plan to assist property owners with decisions relating to erosion control.

In Ashtabula County, “lakefront” also can refer to living on Lake Roaming Rock (Roaming Shores Village), Lake Cardinal or Pymatuning Lake. These inland lakes provide the joys of living on the water without the challenges of erosion.

62 percent of Ashtabula County residents have lived in the same house five years or longer.
Of the 47 condominium units in Lake Erie Vista, only one of them has a glass front door.

That penthouse unit belongs to Dottie Andrus, whose late husband, Ed, had the vision to build both the private lakefront condominiums at Geneva-on-the-Lake and the campground that his widow can see beyond her front door.

The sale of Indian Creek Campground in 2005 capitalized on Ed’s lifelong dream—a lakefront development. At the time the campground sold, it was the largest and most highly rated in Ohio. Ed and Dottie poured their decades of love and marriage into developing and expanding the campground, which was on the south side of Lake Road and, from where Ed stood, too far from Lake Erie.

“He always loved the lake,” says Donna McGrath, his daughter.

Ed was involved in every aspect of constructing the five-story condo development, which was completed three years after his death.

Priced between $220,000 and $499,000, the units sold out relatively quickly. About one-third of them are held as rentals for the growing tourism market. The balance is owner occupied, either as year-round residences or weekend/summer homes.

Donna says resale prices are running about 8 percent above the original price, giving further credence to her father’s lifelong commitment to introducing people to his passions: Lake Erie and Ashtabula County.

Main Photo: Great views of Lake Erie and a private beach are top amenities of living at the condo development.

Bob and Shirley Blair are full-time residents of Lake Erie Vista, a condo development with a private beach at Geneva-on-the-Lake.