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Gee's Bend Quilters Shine at World's Largest Quilting Event

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (March 9, 2026) — The story of Gee's Bend traveled full circle — from the quiet banks of the Alabama River to the global stage of QuiltCon 2026 in Raleigh, N.C.

Nearly a dozen Gee's Bend quilters captivated more than 25,000 attendees at the world's largest modern quilting event, serving as Featured Artists and sharing the bold artistry, rich history and living legacy that have made their work internationally celebrated.

Their presence was more than an exhibit — it was an experience.

An exhibition of 25 quilts of Gee's Bend anchored their space. The exhibition provided an opportunity for attendees to marvel at the exquisite modern and legacy quilts (more than 50 years old). The exhibition quilts were juried by Dr. Elliot Knight and Dr. Jacqueline Viskup of the Alabama State Council on the Arts.

"It's an unusual opportunity for people around the world to engage with Gee's Bend quilters," said Kim V. Kelly, executive director of The Freedom Quilting Bee Legacy Museum. "People know their work. They admire their artistry. But it's not often that the quilters are in a space where they can spend real time talking, sharing and connecting. That's what made this so special. The Freedom Quilting Bee Legacy is thankful to the Modern Quilt Guild extending the invitation to be the featured organization for the convention."

Throughout the event, Gee's Bend quilters hosted live demonstrations that drew eager crowds. Such a demonstration had never been done before at QuiltCon. Two large quilts were mounted in frames, inviting attendees to pick up a needle and thread and try their hand at the time-honored craft of hand quilting — guided by these skilled aficionados of the art.

In an era dominated by machines, the deliberate rhythm of hand quilting felt both powerful and personal. "Hand quilting is unusual in this era, but it's what most of the Gee's Bend quilters do," Kelly said. "Visitors could sit down, stitch alongside a quilter, and have conversations about their

lives, their art and their stories. QuiltCon had never been able to offer that kind of interaction before.”

The excitement continued with exclusive “walk-and-talk” sessions by the Gee’s Bend quilters — intimate, 45-minute conversations limited to about 30 participants each day — where attendees explored the profound influence of Gee’s Bend quilting on art, fashion and culture.

Kelly also delivered a powerful opening-day presentation titled “*County Road 29: Fifteen Miles in Rural Alabama That Changed the World.*” Her talk traced the resilience, creativity and global impact of Gee’s Bend while highlighting a remarkable historical connection: some of the original enslaved people of Gee’s Bend were from Halifax County, N.C. Those people were made to walk to Gee’s Bend and most still carry the last name Pettway from the man who brought them to Alabama, Mark Pettway.

“We were able to talk about that shared history and connection between Gee’s Bend, Alabama, and Halifax County, North Carolina,” Kelly said. “It made being in Raleigh even more meaningful.”

For Alabama’s Black Belt, the moment was one of pride and celebration.

“Alabama’s Black Belt is filled with amazing history and culture, and it’s wonderful when we can export that to other parts of the country and tell our unique story,” said Pam Swanner, director of the Alabama Black Belt Adventures Association. “The Gee’s Bend quilters are perfect ambassadors for the Black Belt.”

Their growing reach reflects that impact. More than 3,000 people attended last year’s Airing of the Quilts Festival in Gee’s Bend — and momentum continues to build.

From a 15-mile stretch of rural Alabama to the largest quilting stage in the world, the women of Gee’s Bend once again proved that their art doesn’t just hang on walls — it connects generations, communities and history itself.

About The Freedom Quilting Bee Legacy (FQB Legacy)

The Freedom Quilting Bee Legacy preserves and uplifts the history, artistry, and economic impact of the Freedom Quilting Bee and the Gee’s Bend Quilters, ensuring that Black women’s creative labor is recognized, protected, and sustained for future generations. The [2026 Airing of the Quilts](#) is set for Oct. 3.

About Alabama Black Belt Adventures Association (ALBBAA)

The Alabama Black Belt Adventures Association is committed to promoting and enhancing outdoor recreation and tourism opportunities in the Black Belt in a manner that provides economic and ecological benefits to the region and its citizens. For information, go to <https://alabamablackbeltadventures.org/>

The Black Belt includes the following 23 counties: Barbour, Bullock, Butler, Choctaw, Clarke, Conecuh, Crenshaw, Dallas, Greene, Hale, Lee, Lowndes, Macon, Marengo, Monroe, Montgomery, Perry, Pickens, Pike, Russell, Sumter, Tuscaloosa and Wilcox.