

# Building Common Ground

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



Building Common Ground Through  
the Quilts of Many Hands



*Rarely have I seen a project that has energized so many from such diverse backgrounds, ages, interests, and professions.*

Superintendent Wendy Lauritzen  
Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve



This past year, the five National Park Service units in Kansas worked together to develop the “Building Common Ground Through the Quilts of Many Hands” education project, which was funded through the National Park Foundation and the African American Experience Fund. Fourth grade students, park staff, and local quilting guilds created quilts with student-made blocks that told stories of each of the five parks. In the summer of 2010 the quilts toured through Kansas to each of the five parks. This dynamic project that connects parks and communities has just completed its first phase and is now waiting for you to join in its success!

## Vision

Having already spent two weeks at each of the Kansas NPS sites, the quilt exhibit will continue to tour the country. It is our hope to have quilts from as many of the National Park Service units as possible, celebrating the proud connection between the NPS and the citizens who share in its history. You have the opportunity to join in the fun, while educating our future generations and creating stewardship for the national parks.

Quilts and blankets are often the embodiment of family and cultural histories. Blanket traditions among American Indian tribes, quilts made by pioneers as part of dowries, and quilting traditions in the African American community are but a few examples. Quilts give a warm, homespun feeling to history; a tangible link to personal stories that live on through the hands of children.

This innovative outreach project is an excellent example of NPS Director Jon Jarvis’s initiative to establish an awareness of National Park Service sites and their relevance to local communities—many of which do not even realize that there is a national park in their own backyard. Participants in this project—young and old alike—can form lasting connections to their park’s compelling stories. School children, families, and communities have an opportunity to pass on their distinctive history through the traditional art of quilting.

*This is one of the most rewarding projects that I have worked on in my NPS career.*

Park Ranger Joan Wilson  
Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site



## How it works

For this project, a fourth grade class near each NPS site in Kansas was selected to have children connect with the history and purpose of their park. Each class had a field trip to the park and special guest speakers were invited to address their class. After the students learned how stories are told through quilts, they each designed and

Each student was awarded a t-shirt with a photo of his or her individual quilt block. The teachers were also awarded a check to purchase classroom supplies. As a result of the visitor voting, the class quilt (and quilt guild) that received the most votes was awarded a grand prize and honored with a formal presentation at the winning school.

*The quilt project was one of the most fun activities we've done as a class. . . . We had a great time and I can't wait to do another project like this one.*

fabricated a 12-inch quilt block with the assistance of local quilt guild members and park rangers. Each student also wrote a one-page essay describing his or her quilt block and the story it represented. These stories were compiled into notebooks and displayed as part of the exhibit. While on exhibit, the public voted on their favorite quilt, which provided civic engagement in the process. In addition to the students' quilts, a "master quilt" featuring a map of all National Park Service sites was made, providing opportunities for all of the parks to add their own beads to the map once they have completed their quilts.

Meghan Eidman  
Chase County Elementary School

During the recent Kansas exhibit, over 7300 park visitors took part in the display over a 68-day period, accounting for approximately 13% of the annual visitation for the National Park Service sites in Kansas. Volunteerism also played an important role in the project, with over 15 volunteers contributing hundreds of hours to the cause.

As always, publicity was key in promoting the project. A DVD was created to document the project and accompany the traveling exhibit. At <http://www.nps.gov/fosc/forkids/quiltproject.htm> you can view this 11-minute presentation.



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