



Freedom Quilting Bee
— Legacy —

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Freedom Quilting Bee Legacy Selects Renowned Montgomery Architecture Firm to Revitalize Building which was the Pillar of the Regional Quilt Economy

To Honor Black Women Who Built Gee's Bend Quilt Economy, Brown Studio has been selected to develop a site master plan and will renovate Historic Building Dedicated in 1969 to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

January 17, 2022 Alberta/Gee's Bend, Wilcox County, Alabama

After a rigorous selection process, The Freedom Quilting Bee Legacy is excited to announce, it has selected Brown Studio Architecture of Montgomery to revitalize the historic building of the Freedom Quilting Bee (The Bee), and to develop a master site plan for its 14+ surrounding acres. The Bee was a women's quilting cooperative in rural Alabama begun in 1966. Just before leading the marches from Selma to Montgomery, AL, in 1965, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. passed through Alberta and the hamlet of Gee's Bend and encouraged its 900 residents to register to vote. It was Dr. King's visit and message which the founding women derived the name "Freedom Quilting Bee", through the vote Black people would gain 'freedom'.

The non-profit group Freedom Quilting Bee Legacy will create a new center celebrating the historical significance of this community in the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Movement of the 1960s. The Freedom Quilting Bee Heritage Center and Museum will provide educational programming on the historical importance of this quilt community and its Black women founders in the time of Jim Crow and segregation; create a living museum for The Bee and its artistic legacy; preserve this quilting art form in the very place from which its significance was born; provide an artistic space to learn and teach this quilting art form and relieve the abject poverty that persists in the community by promoting quilting and textile manufacturing jobs.

Don Brown of Brown Studio offers, "The reward of being an architect is being able to assemble and bring to life the stories, images, and places that are the fabric of our cultural heritage. The story of the Freedom Quilting Bee community deserves to be told and remembered by preserving the special elements of the place and the people who created it. We are honored to be part of the team to assemble this narrative which is the cultural history of this special community that America must understand, appreciate, and support." Brown

Studio has a breadth and depth of experience in historical revitalization that is certain to be a valuable asset to the work needed for this visionary project.

The Freedom Quilting Bee Legacy's mission is to repair, rehabilitate, and expand the original FQB building, built in the 1960s, to become a unique and educational visitor destination for tourists, art lovers, and history buffs. Currently there are no restaurants nor lodging in this remote area of Alabama, much less a comprehensive history of the importance of these women artisans, their struggles and successes, and their connection to the Civil Rights movement. In addition to a retail store and historical exhibits, the site will be a community center—providing studio space for artists and makers, free or low-cost classes to teach quilting and other textile arts, much-needed free internet access for the community, and volunteer and work opportunities. The long-term vision is to build cabins on the property and offer lodging and event hosting for family reunions, weddings, quilting conventions, and more.

This revitalization effort is made possible through receipt of a \$250,000 grant from the Souls Grown Deep Foundation and Community Partnership to revitalize the historic building of the Freedom Quilting Bee.

History of the Freedom Quilting Bee

The Freedom Quilting Bee ("The Bee") was established as a women's co-op in 1966. It was a founding member of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives. The women who founded the Bee were sharecroppers on the same land their ancestors had worked as enslaved people.

Within just a few years, the co-op became a manufacturing headquarters with clients including Sears, Roebuck & Co. and Saks Fifth Avenue and the building was dedicated to Martin Luther King, Jr. Their quilt works became recognized for their innovative and artistic quality and the quilters began to have access to new and exciting economic opportunity: making more money than they ever thought possible and giving them the ability to come out of the fields, provide for their families, install indoor plumbing in their homes, and send their children to college.

In the late 1980s, interest in The Bee's products began to wane. The contracts with their most profitable retailers were not renewed. Although The Bee's quilters transitioned to making cloth bags for conferences and various groups there was little interest in the young people in the community to continue the quilting tradition. Many of the founders aged and began to pass away.

The Bee shuttered its doors in the 1990s, and the building fell into disrepair. Elaine Williams, President of Freedom Quilting Bee Legacy, returned to her childhood home of Alberta after more than 30 years and was surprised and saddened to see that a place of great pride was no longer operating. Williams set out to bring attention back to the great works of these women whom she'd grown to know as resilient and innovative and began the process to establish the Freedom Quilting Bee Legacy.

About the Freedom Quilting Bee Legacy

The Freedom Quilting Bee Legacy is a nonprofit organization dedicated to revitalizing the

Freedom Quilting Bee historic building and sharing the history of this community, its role in the Civil Rights and Voting Rights movement, and its artistic legacy with the world. In addition to educating people about the historic contribution of The Bee, the FQBL also seeks to bring economic growth, tourism, and jobs to one of the poorest counties in the U.S.

For more information and to donate, visit freedomquilting.com.

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