

## 2023 Annual Conference and Member Meeting Knocks It Out of the Park!



*The Lincoln Room at the Kellogg Center was packed with barn enthusiasts.*

*Photo by Tammis Donaldson*

A bit of snow notwithstanding, when MBPN members gathered at the Kellogg Center in East Lansing on March 4th, they experienced a day filled with informative presentations, food, camaraderie, and networking among Michigan's barn preservation community. This year's theme was: "How We Do the Work of Barn Preservation."

Nearly 100 attendees (!) braved the late winter weather to join us for a day of celebration...and reflection. As MBPN Treasurer Clare Koenigsnecht noted, "Many barn lovers made an exceptional effort to attend. Happy smiling faces filled the Lincoln Room and the hallways. The donuts, presenters, meeting, auction, lunch, and Barn of the Year presentations were outstanding!"

In keeping with its theme, the Annual Conference featured four presenters who have each spent many years doing the actual hands-on work of barn preservation. These four represent hundreds of years of accumulated experience and knowledge of barn construction and preservation. Chad Stitt, Michael Schmitt, Dan Deitz, and Ken Brock proved to be a stellar group of presenters who kept the audience riveted with shared observations on the past, present, and future of barn preservation. A few of their observations are included in the sidebar on page 3.

Those of us in the Baby Boomer generation lived through and witnessed the steep decline of traditional farming. The highest number of farms in Michigan was around 1910 - and from that high point, farm numbers declined steadily until the depression and WWII.



*MBPN volunteers welcome Conference attendees.*

When I say traditional farms, I mean the farms that were developed out of the early settlement period of clearing the land. Those farms were generally small (as small as 40 acres), and most were 80 and sometimes up to 160 acres. It was diversified farming. They raised wheat, oats, corn, hay, and a few chickens, some hogs, and a few cows. And, of course, they had at least one and sometimes two teams of draft horses. Other labor was supplied by the family. Farmers then had low energy consumption, no chemicals, and little debt outside of their mortgages.

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## President's Message

### T & T Trailer Travels

First, I'd like to second the kudos coming in for the MBPN Annual Conference and Member Meeting that took place in East Lansing in March. It was the best conference that I can remember! Everything went very well (except for the effects of the snowstorm), and I do believe that we advanced the case for barn preservation in Michigan!

On other topics, MBPN's youth barn raising program, Teamwork and Timbers, is looking forward to a busy year. It spent January with the Architectural program at Andrews University in Berrien Springs. Spring Plow Day on Saturday April 29 at Tillers International just East of Kalamazoo will showcase plowing with oxen and at 2:00 pm the raising of our T & T barn.

Grandparents University at MSU on June 28 will feature another barn raising in the Atrium inside of Agricultural Hall.

On Saturday September 16, it will be raised near the water powered grist mill at Hadley, MI in conjunction with the Farm Hop Barn tour just southeast of Flint.

Pioneer Day at the Waterloo Farm Museum near Jackson has plans to erect it at 1:00 pm and 3:00 pm on Sunday October 8.

I hope that you can make it to one of these events to watch or participate.

—Tom Irrer, MBPN President



Tom Irrer

*(continued from page 1)*

The Boomer generation lived through the steep decline of these traditional farming principles. As a consequence, we are the last generation that has first-hand knowledge and memories of what traditional farming was like.

I have looked at many barns that have problems and with owners who are thinking that their barns are too far gone to repair... that the whole barn is no good and needs to go. In those instances, I point out that it may be only 10 percent of the fabric of the building that is deteriorated, and that 90 percent is in good condition.

The point is - the Annual Conference presenters demonstrated that they have the skills and knowledge about barn preservation needed to make a difference in today's changed barn and rural environment. They shared some of that with us at the conference, and we are grateful. Their presentations really focused on the essence of why MBPN exists!

Thanks to everyone who gave the extra effort to make the 2023 Conference a joy-filled, memorable event!

—Steve Stier

*One of the popular parts of any Annual Conference and Member Meeting is the live auction. We again raised funds for the MBPN, with the help of our returning auctioneer (with assistance from Dan Creyts and Board Member Richard Harvey)!*



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# Annual Conference Speakers Focus on “How Hands-On Barn Preservation Works”



Chad Stitt

**Chad Stitt** started his own business American Heritage Barn Preservation in 2016 after growing up working with his dad, grandpa, uncles, and cousins. Chad told us about his experiences in foundation repairs, structural straightening, and general barn repairs. “Our mission is to preserve agriculture and family legacy with honesty and integrity.”

**Michael Schmitt** – A stonemason and stone carver for 20 years, Michael has extensive background in traditional authentic stone masonry. He uses historically correct methods and materials – splitting stone by hand and using traditional lime mortars. He demonstrated stone-laying techniques, explained the different types of mortar and described the levels of stone foundation repair – tuckpointing or repointing, leaving the old foundation and relaying the face, or a complete rebuilt.



Michael Schmitt

Deitz House Moving Engineers have been moving buildings, big and small, all over Michigan for more than 70 years. They have moved dozens of barns in the most dramatic ways while saving barns throughout the state. **Dan Deitz** told us how they make it look easy.



Dan Deitz

**Ken Brock** of Legendary Timberworks is a Michigan residential licensed builder and Timber Frame Guild instructor, with a career of providing complete full-service barn restoration, new builds in timber frame, building lifts, moves in-whole and via disassembly, reassembly, foundations, doors, siding, windows, painting, design, consulting, and engineering. In his presentation, Ken reflected on his career repairing, lifting, moving and restoring structures and recalled some of his most significant projects, including Maybury State Park Barn, Thayers Park Barn, Botsford Inn Coach House Barn, and the Dickerson Barn, to name only a few. Many of his projects involved historical societies and public-private partnerships.

How he got started: Ken was an automotive engineer who got laid off and had some time to figure out what he wanted to do next. Maybury State Park was looking to rebuild a living farm, so he volunteered to champion the relocation of two barns from property that Toll Brothers was developing. That led to other historic preservation projects involving community fundraising efforts to move unwanted barns to public spaces. Collaborating with historical

societies and foundations, municipalities, property owners, suppliers and contractors, he mastered the politics of getting it done.

## Advice from Lessons Learned

### For Contractors:

- When you do something well, you won't have to look for more projects. They will find you.
- You have to allow someone to invest where they have their passion. Understand expectations – where the passion is coming from. Ask about the end use of the building and the memories associated with it. History matters.

### For Project Teams:

- Overwhelming projects are nothing more than a group of little things and a couple of not-so-little ones.
- Instead of looking at problems as obstacles, view them as opportunities. Obstacles can be terrifying. Opportunities are interesting.
- You can make things happen by being solutions oriented.
- Be decisive and confirm consensus.

### Finally—and this was a welcome message imparted from our presenters:

- Be careful where you get your advice
- The MBPN has a technical committee
- Actively engage in the MBPN, the organization has made a significant impact of the Preservation of Heritage Structures.



Ken Brock and MBPN Barn of the Year Committee member Tom Nehil.



Conference Coordinator and Past President Steve Stier (retired barn contractor and educator) welcomes the crowd.

# 2023 Barn of the Year Awards Honor Excellence

The MBPN's most prestigious award, the Michigan Barn of the Year Awards, are presented annually to honor barn owners who have made the extra effort to maintain or restore historic barns. The program honors existing Michigan barns and supports our ongoing mission to preserve our agricultural heritage. During the program's 28 year history, 108 barns have received the recognition.

The categories in which awards are presented are for barns or farmsteads in use for:

- Continuing Agricultural Use
  - Family (Private), Non-Profit or Commercial
- Adapted to Other Uses
  - Family (Private), Non-Profit or Commercial

Barns have been judged for (1) completeness of information presented

in the application, (2) sensitivity and integrity of repairs or modifications, (3) visual appeal, (4) creativity, (5) thoroughness of work and (6) effort expended to repair and maintain.

Nominated barns must be in-use, either for continued agricultural use or adapted for other uses. Barns must retain their overall appearance—both in their interior and exterior barn characteristics. Nominations are open to the public, reviewed, and determined by MBPN Awards Committee members. This year, eighteen (18) submissions were received for consideration.

Seven (7) Barn of the Year Awards were presented at the Michigan Barn Preservation Network's Annual Conference held at MSU's Kellogg Conference Center in East Lansing, on Saturday, March 4th.

—Keith Anderson, MBPN Awards Committee Chair

## Here are the seven recipients of this year's awards:



### The Ebers Family Barn

John R. Ebers, Family Member  
Continuing Family Agricultural Use  
Kent County  
Comstock Park, MI

The barn is a core fixture in this 5th generation family farm. This year, the Ebers family celebrates the 1883 barn's Quadra deca-centennial—that's 140 years! There's much to love about this 70' x 54' barn—including its shingled gable roof, its fieldstone foundation and very



*Pictured from left—Keith Anderson, Chair, MBPN Awards; Gay Ebers Frankowiak, John Ebers, Elaine Gordon, Julie Ebers Neff, Molly Ebers, Eva Videtich, Joe Videtich, Ellen Ebers Lounihan, Jack Lounihan and Tom Irrer, MBPN President.*

distinctive cupola, as well as its hay rail and fork system.

According to its current generation stewards, the barn “has been used, preserved and renovated throughout its history.” It has been used for farming, both dairy and apple, as well as weddings and the backdrop for family photos through the generations.

Maintenance updates (just during the past year) include new footings in the fieldstone foundation, four new wood sliding doors, a remodel of its iconic cupola, a coat of barn red paint and white trim, and the year of its birth (1883) painted boldly below the cupola.

The judges of this year's Barn of the Year Committee celebrated the barn's remarkable continuity through five generations and the steady effort made over time by the family in order to maintain it.

## “Great Michigan Barns” Honors Exceptional Nominees

Thanks again, to the Barn of the Year Awards Committee, which is comprised of the following volunteers, who spend many hours looking at the nominations:

Ina Hanel-Gerdenich	Rose Putnam
Keith Kehlbeck	Nicole VanBlaricum
Mara Lancaster	Patrick McKay
Tom Nehil	

As always, we are grateful for the committee's loyalty in this annual process. Their participation and input ensures that this program's success is an integral part of MBPN's continuing influence on preserving the barns of Michigan.

While not every barn that is submitted receives the Barn of the Year award, all nominees are deserving of recognition for their unique characteristics and history. At our Annual Conferences, we also recognize those “runner-up” barns that are nevertheless meritorious enough to receive Certificates of Appreciation for their contributions to the Michigan barn preservation pantheon. This year, those barns included: “Trails End Barn” Kalkaska; “Loudenslager Barn” Burr Oak; “Bur's Wagon Shed” Cheboygan; “Banjolina Barn” Monroe; “Meadowbrook Barn” Rockford; “Stout Street Barn” Grosse Ile; “Hidden Vineyard Barn” Berrien Springs; “Vale Royal Barn” Fenton; “Serenity Barn” Iron River; “Garden View Homestead Barn” Byron Center; and “Michigan Bee Barn” Comstock Park.



*Attending the conference, Roxanne Ellis was presented her “Great Michigan Barns” certificate for the Banjolina Barn.*





**Pond House Farm Barn**

Commercial Agricultural Use  
 Jim & Theresa Williams, Owners  
 Wexford County  
 Manton, MI

Pond House Farm Barn is so named because of the numerous ponds dug to take advantage of the natural springs amongst the farm buildings. The barn consists of the main gambrel roofed structure built in 1910, as well as the “Store” and the “Chicken Wing,” which were added later. The barn features horizontal tongue and groove siding, a three-bay loft, and floor joists made from eight-inch round tree trunks.

The barn has been developed into a commercial venture, and the



*Pictured from left—Keith Anderson, MBPN Awards Chair; Theresa & Jim Williams, Tom Irrer, MBPN President*

owners sell produce to people who purchase membership in the farm. Members come to shop in the attached Store, which was originally a house for hired hands. The barnyard has been converted into beds for cut flowers and herbs. There are also gardens for growing vegetables and small fruits. The attached Chicken Wing is used for—what else?—raising chickens for their eggs and meat.

In 2021, the owners took steps to make repairs and renovations and topped off their efforts with a new paint job. According to the Williamses, “This barn has been an important constant in the life of our family, and we’re happy to see it returned to its former glory.”



**Maple Woods Farm Barn**

Adaptive Re-Use - Family  
 Lee & Floy Barthel and Earl Baxtresser, Owners  
 Oakland County  
 Farmington Hills, MI

Maple Woods Farm Barn is another barn that is more than a century old, built in 1916 by a wealthy “gentleman farmer” in the countryside near the big city of Detroit—now the busy suburb of Farmington Hills. A “whopper” of a barn, it actually consists of two gambrel-roofed barns connected by a gable roof barn in between. Of board and batten construction, it is painted all white with shingled roofs, ventilators atop the two end barns, and with hay track and trolley throughout all three sections.

Maple Woods was originally a dairy operation—a “hobby farm” for its wealthy owner. The current owners purchased the down-and-out operation in the mid-1950s, first using it as headquarters for their concrete construction company. Today, it houses the family’s “Classic



*Pictured from left—Keith Anderson, MBPN Awards Chair; Earl & Dorothea Baxtresser, Tom Irrer, MBPN President*

Car” collection, a regulation-sized badminton court, and a scale model train layout.

Meticulously maintained by its current owners (dating to 1957), it is unique both for its size and for its well-maintained condition amongst what is now surrounding commercial and residential subdivisions.

Quoting Earl Baxtresser, a 2nd generation co-owner, “The barn and the other buildings on the property are a part of this family’s identity. The preservation and maintenance of these buildings is an existential part of our lives—now and into the future.”



### **Pawlusiak Barn**

Adaptive Re-Use – Private  
Robert & Lois Pawlusiak – Owners  
Washtenaw County  
Clinton, MI

When purchased by our owners 12 years ago, this 1885 horse barn—built a hundred and thirty-eight years ago—was all that remained of a large dairy farm in Washtenaw County. Built too close to the road, and with the property being developed into the county’s Riverbend Park along the Raisin River, the barn needed to be moved in order to be saved. D & B Movers of Dundee, MI were enlisted to move it to its new location.

Purpose-built for horses, the little barn is unique, featuring Italianate ornamentation, overhanging eaves, decorative corbels, and tall, rounded windows. At 24’ x 36’, it is a two-story timber-framed structure complete with a hay trolley (with fork) and a gable end door for leading hay into the loft. Originally fitted with stall spaces for six horses, it is being converted into a cottage with bedrooms in the loft.

Only by examining photos of the barn before its move can one appreciate the heroic effort to save and restore this unique barn. Now meticulously restored, the outside is true to its original 1885 look.

In accepting the award, the Pawlusiaks declared, “The preservation of this building was an honor.”



*Robert Pawlusiak proudly displays his 2023 Barn of the Year Award in front of his relocated and restored barn.*



### **Murphy Barn**

Family Adaptive Re-Use  
Keith & Kelly Murphy – Owners  
Oakland County  
Rochester Hills, MI

This 30’ x 40’ gambrel-roofed barn was built around 1892, long before the sprawling suburb of Rochester Hills (in which it finds itself) came to envelope it. Solidly built around a traditional framework of logs and hand-hewn timber, the barn’s time came for significant intervention necessary to preserve it for future generations.

Motivated to return the barn to its original beauty, the Murphys enlisted the services of Joe Churches of K & L Construction. Initiated in 2017, the restoration work included powder-post



*Pictured from the left—Keith Anderson, MBPN Awards Chair; Keith & Kelly Murphy and Tom Irrer, MBPN President.*

beetle abatement, and exterior issues of closing leaky window wells, replacing damaged siding and trim, adding new sliding doors, replacing the lean-to roof, and applying fieldstone to the cement block foundation.

Construction of a safety railing in the loft, installation of a chandelier, and the addition of a dry bar were the finishing touches needed to establish a nice setting for an event space. Oh, and a final interesting oddity (originally a fruit cellar found behind a door in the stone retaining wall of the bridge leading to the upper level) was a room designed as a bomb shelter—a leftover from the Cold War of the ‘50s?

**SAVE THE DATE: The Fall Barn Tour is Coming—  
October 3rd—in northern Isabella County!**





**Barn 1888**  
 Commercial Adaptive Re-Use  
 Bryan & Danielle Howarth – Owners  
 Allegan County  
 Hopkins, MI

Wedding venue barns have become very popular. This barn was

the choice of our judges from among five nominees in the adaptive-use category.

The barn was built (as the name suggests) in 1888. While alterations were necessary to adapt it to its new use, this 68' x 36' gambrel bank barn still retains much of its "historic fabric." Still in place are its original milk house, cow stanchions in the basement, silo butting up close to the barn, original hand-hewn 10" x 10" beams, original barn wood on the interior, and the original hay trolley. A concession to its originality is the steel siding on the exterior, as well as the new red oak flooring. A nice touch is the old wood flooring, which was repurposed to sheath the two bathrooms required by local code. The new owners opted to do the renovations on their own with the aid of their two sons. "None of us carpenters," according to Danielle Howarth, "but handy in many ways."

The entire farmstead remains intact, including the farmhouse, the main barn with milk house, a second bank barn, a windmill, a chicken coop, a corn crib, and a silo. "Keeping everything as original as we could was very important," says Danielle. "We hope everyone enjoys the craftsmanship that was put into building this barn...and all of the new renovations that were done to maintain its beauty," she adds.

*Note: Bryan & Danielle Howarth were unable to attend the Conference to receive their award. It will be presented to them at their barn's site in the near future.*



**The Unruh Barn**  
 Non Profit Adaptive Use  
 Meridian Charter Township – Owners  
 Brad Brogren, President, Friends of Historic Meridian – Applicant  
 Ingham County  
 Okemos, MI

When the original Unruh farm located in Okemos, MI was sold for development, this barn was donated to a nearby historical village. The modest 42' x 24' gable roof, timber-frame barn was built in the 1870s. One hundred twenty years later, in 1991, the barn was secured, raised, and moved a half mile across a field to



*Pictured from left—Keith Anderson, MBPN Awards Chair; Deborah Guthrie, Meridian Township Clerk; Brad Brogren, President, Friends of Historic Meridian; Tom Irrer, MBPN President*

its new home. Fully restored, it now resides as a key component of the Meridian Historical Village.

Today, the barn stands as testament to the area's agricultural heritage and serves as a tool for teaching and learning. A museum exhibiting old agricultural tools, it also has a blacksmith shop within. The building is a popular site for public events, and it regularly hosts school children who learn about early farm life by touring the barn.

Brad Brogren, past President of MBPN and President of the Friends of Historic Meridian, says, "It is the hope and intent that educating the public about our past will continue well into the future."

Photos provided by Tammis Donaldson and Keith Anderson



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Spring 2023 No. 101

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*Share, reuse, recycle this newsletter*

## The MBPN recently welcomed a new member of our Board of Directors—Kevin Kirk.

Kevin is a native of Michigan, raised on a small dairy farm in southern Michigan. He and his wife Dana Sue purchased their first farm in St. Johns in 1977. Since then, they acquired another small farm and land in Lenawee County where they built a retirement home.

He received his Bachelor of Science degree from Michigan State University in Dairy Science in 1971. He received his Master's of Science degree in animal science at Michigan State University in December 1995. His research was done in the area of Michigan Right-to-Farm.

Kevin worked for Michigan Farm Bureau for 20 years in various capacities, finally ending that career as a Livestock and Right-To-Farm Specialist. This work involved environmental issues with numerous state and county governmental agencies. He served the Michigan Department of Agriculture for 13 years as Special Assistant to the State Veterinarian. The position focused on special projects, which needed leadership and team guidance, along with disseminating information regarding the department's disease control efforts and animal health strategies. His career objective was to be an agricultural leader providing assistance and guidance to Michigan farmers and Michigan citizens as they approach an era of accelerating change.

*Please join us in welcoming Kevin to the Board!*

—Keith Kehlbeck, MBPN Communications Chair  
and Newsletter Editor



*Kevin Kirk*

## Marcia Danner Receives the MBPN President's Award

Since she and her husband Gerry attended the 2018 MBPN Conference, Marcia Danner has taken on the role of web-manager "extraordinaire." She is the go-between that enables MBPN to share our work with the world: [www.mibarn.net](http://www.mibarn.net).

For the MBPN, the work she does is fantastic! She follows our internal communications and anticipates what needs to be updated and created, often before MBPN board members are aware that they should tell her! Her responsiveness to MBPN's needs is much appreciated! Marcia anticipates MBPN's needs and timing. She is a problem solver and fixes most issues as soon as our board members can let her know there is an issue. Although she spent most of her writing and editing career managing print publications, she eventually transitioned to online media and in retirement, learned how to do websites.

As the saying goes, it really "takes a village" for a volunteer-based nonprofit to be effective. Often, what enables our work happens in the background. Marcia Danner is one of those critical volunteers who is making our Michigan Barn Preservation Network "present in Michigan – and in the work that we do." So . . . the 2023 recipient of the MBPN President's Award—presented at the Annual Conference—with deep and abiding THANKS for all that she does—is Marcia Danner!

—Julie Avery, MBPN Vice President