



A packed room of MBPN members heard informative and inspiring presentations.

Photos by Keith Kehlbeck

Annual Conference and Member Meeting— Pointing the Way Forward!

On Saturday, March 15th, Michigan barn enthusiasts gathered for the Michigan Barn Preservation Network's Annual Conference and Member Meeting. This year, the conference was held at the AgroLiquid Conference Center in St. Johns, which was also the site of our 2018 conference.

The AgroLiquid Conference Center is conveniently located in mid-Michigan about 20 miles north of Lansing and has up-to-date technology and amenities. It even has an interactive museum devoted to agricultural history, innovation and exploration.

The day was filled with camaraderie, informative presentations, awards, and inspiration—reinforcing the MBPN's mission of “promoting the appreciation, preservation, and rehabilitation of Michigan barns, farmsteads, and rural communities.”

As MBPN Treasurer Clare Koenigs-knecht noted after the Conference, “What a glorious day to be part of a conference center filled with folks who have a special place in their hearts for barns. Thanks for an extraordinary effort by so many to make this day so special. Filled to the rafters, great program, good food, and welcoming smiles everywhere. First time attendees I welcomed said



Vera Wiltse and Rose Putnam anchored the registration table and greeted attendees

their first conference was very special. Life is about memories and our 2025 annual conferences one of them.”

—Richard Harvey and Keith Kehlbeck

Officers

Tom Irrer, President
tomirrer21@gmail.com
(989) 640-1868
St. Johns

**Julie Avery, Vice President,
Communications and Finance/
Endowment Committees**
averyj@msu.edu
(517) 927-1958
Empire

**Clare Koenigs knecht, Treasurer
and Past President
Membership and Finance/
Endowment Committees**
clarek13@gmail.com
(989) 593-2351
Fowler

**Vera Wiltse
Recording Secretary and
Program Chair**
vera@wiltse.com
(989) 465-1216
Coleman

Board and Volunteers

**Keith Anderson
BoY Awards Chair**
klanderson42@gmail.com
(616) 540-6701
Sparta

**Steve Rademacher
Nominations**
rademachersteve22@yahoo.com
(517) 202-1443
Fowler

**Keith Kehlbeck
Communications Chair
MIBARN Editor/Coordinator**
keith@k2consulting.net
(269) 317-3771
Marshall

**Richard Harvey
Program & Technical Committees**
rhhav@gmail.com
(231) 920-8000
Harrietta

**Laurie Sisco
Barn Tour Co-Chair**
laurelsisco@gmail.com
810-252-0457
Lapeer

Ruth Stahl
ruth@stahleventbarn.com
(231) 878-4961
McBain

Doug Benoit
DouglasWHC@gmail.com

Beverly Monroe
monroeachers@yahoo.com

**Melissa Jaskiewicz
Barn Tour Committee**
Mejay57@aol.com

**Steve Stier,
Nominations and Technical Com-
mittees, Past President** stephen-
stier@gmail.com
(517) 648-2933
Empire

**Kristine Ranger
Calendar Chair**
kmranger11@gmail.com
(517) 974-5697
Houghton Lake

**Tammis Donaldson
Emeritus Board Member
Technical & Communications
Committees**
tammis@ekocite.com
(248) 561-4248
Royal Oak

Communications

**Marcia Danner
Webmaster and Editor**
marciadanner@comcast.net
(248) 891-3750

**Robert Slocum
Newsletter Design**
bob.designworks@gmail.com
(269) 425-0486
Battle Creek

www.mibarn.net



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President's Message

Growing!

It's always great to see a large crowd at our Annual Conference! This year's gathering again provided many ideas for saving our rural heritage.

There are different ways to observe (and preserve) barns. We can admire the skill and craftsmanship in our old barns. We can lament the loss of barns by owners who allow their barns to be torn down or worse, and those barns typically die a slow, ugly death. That is one way of looking at the past. Or, we can look ahead and show examples of barn owners who have kept their barns alive for future generations.

I believe that our efforts will have the greatest impact of preserving more barns by showing how people have kept their barns alive. Barns that are kept alive make their owners—and all who enter them—happy. Even people who don't own barns expect to see traditional barns in the countryside and are comforted by their presence. Showing examples of what can be done is the best way to promote the appreciation, preservation, and rehabilitation of Michigan barns, farmsteads, and rural communities.

If you are a barn owner, keep your barn alive. The MBPN can help. Also think of what you can do to help us grow as an organization and influence more rural preservation. If you haven't yet contributed to our Endowment, please consider doing so. The "35 Hours of Giving" article on page 7 is an example of how we continue to encourage and excite support for our organization.

I feel that we have the best barn website in the country, and our quarterly newsletter and electronic e-news also rank at the top compared with other states. Membership is up, and our endowment insures the future of MBPN. Dozens of barn enthusiasts attend our conferences and barn tours. All of these efforts help us to continue growing. Thanks in advance for your help in making that growth possible!
—Tom Irrer, MBPN President



Tom Irrer

Do You Have a Photo for the 2026 MBPN Calendar?



MBPN Calendar Chair Kristine Ranger notes that it is never too early to begin assembling photos for the next Network calendar. If you have a photo you think might be worth submitting to the Calendar committee, we need you to fill out a barn info/permission form, which can be found on the MBPN website at <https://mibarn.net/calendar/>. That page on the website also includes photo submission guidelines for photographers. We strongly encourage interested parties to use this portal to begin the process of having your picture (and barn) considered for next year's calendar!



Did you know MBPN
has its own YouTube channel?

At www.youtube.com/@MiBarnPreservationNetwork, you can view Bob Griffin's barn being reconstructed at Ogemaw County Fairgrounds.



Ina Hanel-Gerdenich



Deron Nelson



Kathy Adams

Conference Presenters Provide Perspective on Preservation and Adaptation

The presenters at this year's Annual Conference were steeped in the agricultural heritage traditions so important to the Michigan Barn Preservation Network. Their backgrounds (and some brief observations from their presentations):

Ina Hanel-Gerdenich, Mirka Productions, LLC, led off the presentations, drawing on her extensive work in the preservation field for over thirty years, specializing in historic resources associated with rural agriculture. Her insightful talk centered on the history and usage of tower silos.

"From the perspective of an architectural historian (which is my background)...the silo is probably the second most iconic structure on a farm. The silo has had a huge impact on the dairy industry, and it's really what enabled the dairy industry to grow so fast, as it did during the 20th century. Experimentation (with silos) in the 1880s, 1890s, and even the 1900s was all about 'How can we best do this?' Different shapes and different types of silos spread from Illinois to Maryland, New Jersey, the New England area...and eventually to Michigan. They experimented with wood, stone, brick, and concrete... and finally, towards the middle and end of the 20th century, we started seeing bunkers and trenches for silage—a trend that continues today with plastic silage bags increasingly being found across fields, coming full circle in the use of silos and silage."

Deron Nelson is a large animal veterinarian in Coopersville, Michigan. His interest in traditional timber-frame structures led to his immersion in the techniques of timber-framing and to building his first timber-frame, a 32'x48' horse barn with a full loft that was featured in the 2016 barn tour. He has since been involved in the construction and design of several other timber-frames. His presentation (in two parts, before and after lunch) went into great detail about design considerations, the process of cutting members and joinery, assembly, raising the timber-frame, and final construction—culminating in how we can produce a "new traditional barn."

"I do not do this for a living. I'm just an ordinary, average guy

who likes old barns and wanted one. After taking a timber-framing class at Tillers (<https://tillersinternational.org>), I thought, 'Maybe this is something I can do.' My first project was pretty small scale...and then I set out on a scale to do something on a little bit bigger scale. (Along the way), we got people involved in the community, community businesses to support and provide funding, and community people to build (timber-frame structures).

Kathy, Greg and Blain Adams are the owners and operators of Stone House Vineyards in Evart, Michigan. Their farm was established in 1910 as a dairy farm operation. Now in its sixth generation of family, the farm has been re-imagined and turned into a fruit farm and winery complete with a tasting room for the public to come and experience wine tastings. In her presentation, Kathy explained the construction process that culminated in the evolution of the Stone House Barn from dairy production to a winery tasting room...and how the family now welcomes visitors to their farm and winery.

"Our property has been in the family since 1910. Once a dairy farm, we have turned it into a fruit farm. A tasting room now showcases our wines and ciders. Our vineyard was planted in 2017 after a trip to Napa Valley and further studies in the Traverse City Region of Michigan. Our first harvest came in 2020. Our apple orchard grove consists of antique apple trees for our ciders. Come join the fun at the winery - Thursday - Saturday from 1:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. We look forward to hosting you."

In addition to these informative presentations, the Conference included a member meeting (with election of Board members and committee reports), a silent auction of various farm-related items, the traditional (and lively) live auction, led by incomparable auctioneer Chuck Chestnut (with help from assistants, including Dan Creyts), a lovely buffet lunch, and, of course, the presentation of the annual Barn of the Year Awards (see page 4). Thanks to all who made this event possible, and in particular Conference Chair Richard Harvey. We hope to see even more MBPN members at next year's Annual Conference (and this fall at our Fall Barn Tour...stay tuned!)

Six Barns Receive MBPN's Top Award for 2025

The MBPN's most prestigious awards, 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. Photos and histories of the more than 100 barns that have been declared recipients of the Barn of the Year are found on MBPN's website at www.mibarn.net.

There were 13 nominations submitted for consideration for this year's Barn of the Year Award. Those 13 barns are spread across 10

counties throughout the Mitten part of our state. From those, six barns were selected for the annual award. In addition, two individuals received awards for their contributions to barn preservation. All awards were presented during MBPN's Annual Conference held this year in St. Johns on March 15.

—Keith Anderson, MBPN Awards Committee Chair



In the Category of Continuing Agricultural Use, the Award went to:

The Somerville Barn
Mason, Michigan
Ingham County
Owners: Bruce and Suzanne Caltrider



There is a lot to love about this massive barn and its very impressive story involving several generations of the same family—notable for its great age and size. Two large barns became one massive barn back in the 1880s, when one was moved and attached to the other, end to end, by members of the same family. Now, 90 feet in length, these barns dating to the 1880s feature hand-hewn framing, utilizing logs—some with the bark still remaining. The end facing the road displays the legend “1881 PJ Somerville”—the original descendants who settled there in 1863.



In the Category of Non Profit Adaptive Use, the Award went to:

The Fisk Family Barn
White Lake, Michigan
Oakland County
Owners: White Lake Historical Society
President: Greg Baroni
Applicant: Barb Allison

This traditional timber-framed, gambrel-roofed former dairy barn dates to about 1900. Following the death of the last member of



the family that settled the area in the 1850s, the entire farmstead (farmhouse, carriage house, three-seater outhouse, two corn cribs, pig house, hen house and windmill) fell into disrepair. White Lake Township purchased the farmstead with the intention of demolishing them all and perhaps building a firehouse or township offices. At the urging of a township resident the White Lake Historical Society was formed in 1987 and was successful in saving and preserving the site. Well maintained throughout its life, the work to rehabilitate the barn and other buildings was relatively minor (painting and basic repairs). Two additions to the property, a one-room school house and the erection of a community pavilion, has made the 'village', including the well-loved barn, into the jewel of White Lake Township.



In the Category of Family Adaptive Use, the Award went to:

The Merle Green Family Barns
Elsie, Michigan
Clinton County
Owner: Charles Green
Applicant: Emily (Green) Klingbeil

These two barns date back to the 1940s (though the Green Family's ownership of the dairy farm dates back to 1922). The barns held 110 milk cows and were in use for 50 years until abandoned in 1998 when



the dairy cow operation expanded from 1,500 cows to 3,000 cows.

The barns stood empty and largely neglected for 22 years until a major rehabilitation project was undertaken for the farm's Centennial in 2022. That year, 1,200 people attended the Farm's Centennial Celebration, including tours of the two newly-renovated barns, complete with exhibits and displays of the farm's 100-year history. Having now been used for family weddings and community events, there is pride in the heritage of five generations of the Green family having called the farm home for the past 103 years.



In the Category of Continuing Agricultural Use, the Award went to:

The Kucharek Barn
Howell, Michigan
Livingston County
Owner: Leah Kucharek



The 'before and after' of this barn's restoration is stunning. Not big or fancy (30' x 40' with a small lean-to off the back), the effort undertaken by its current owners to re-

store it to the lovely old barn seen here was massive in nature. Built in the late 1800s, the Kuchareks acquired it 20 years ago, but fixing the barn was low priority until two years ago. After making significant repairs, a dark walnut stain was applied (18 gallons). The barn now serves as shelter for two horses, storage for hay and roaming area for several barn kittens.



In the Category of Private Adaptive Use, the Award went to:

The Gasior Barn
Fenton, Michigan
Livingston County
Owners: Kevin & Karen Gasior

Another barn whose "before and after" presentations is truly astounding, this is the type of barn that many observers would have likely



called unsavable and given up on. This gable-roofed barn measures a modest 48' x 36'. Thought to have been built in the 1860s, the Gasiors acquired the barn and property nine years ago and spent the last eight years

transforming it into what you see here. That heroic project required jacking up the barn, installing a concrete block foundation (with the original field stones adorning the exterior), sourcing new white pine vertical siding and cedar shake roof shingles from Copper Harbor in the far reaches of the UP. A unique finishing recipe included vinegar, chopped steel wool, black tea and coffee grounds sprayed on the exterior wood completed the massive project.

continued on next page



In the Category of Commercial Adaptive Use, the Award was presented to:

**The B & B Heartwoods Barn
Ann Arbor, Michigan
Washtenaw County
Owners: William & Bonnie Geschwender**

Originally built for dairy, this old barn was built in 1944 to replace an older barn destroyed by an F4 tornado. The Geschwenders made



the barn the headquarters for their successful commercial hardwood business when they moved it to the renovated barn in 1998. The barn is large—75 feet long with 6 bays, a gambrel roof and attached 50-foot silo. When William and Bonnie acquired

the farmstead in 1986, the barn and property had been neglected for some years. Significant work, some might say heroic effort, was required to return the barn to any useful condition. Recently, the barn and accompanying buildings got new roofs and a beautiful “forest green” paint job—using exclusively four-inch paint brushes—another massive undertaking. 2025 marks 40 years in business, a milestone for which they are pleased and proud.

Founders Awards

Two individuals were presented with MBPN’s highest honor at MBPN’s recent Annual Conference for their exceptional dedication to the Network’s mission in promoting the preservation and reha-

bilitation of Michigan’s Barns and Rural Communities. The Founders Award recognizes that sometimes it isn’t about the barn, but instead is about the individual behind the barn’s story.

Steven J. Brown of Kalkaska, Michigan, considered himself a ‘broken’ soldier, having just returned from multiple tours in Iraq, when, in 2016, he found a ‘broken barn’. In the years since the two came together, and Steve working to restore the barn, which he named Trails End, it became a symbol for healing and restoration for himself as well as the barn. Steven’s and the barn’s inspiring stories stand as a centerpiece in the Kalkaska Community for the preservation of Northern Michigan History. The Michigan Barn Preservation Network was proud to present the Founders Award to Steven J. Brown for His Exceptional Dedication to Barn Restoration As a Tool For Healing.



Dr. Deron Nelson of Ottawa County’s Coopersville, Michigan has re-invigorated the lost art of traditional barn-building. Deron, a practicing veterinarian in his community, has built two barns on his horse farm using the ‘old-fashioned’ skill of timber-framing, using traditional mortise and tenon joinery—using one-inch white oak pegs rather than nails. As a throwback to old-fashioned ‘barn raising’, Deron organized a crew of 70 volunteers to assist with ‘hand-raising’ each of the 5 bents without benefit of mechanized cranes or hydraulic lifts. Literally, building ‘new’ timber-frame barns using “old” techniques, he is applying to construction techniques that require and demonstrates the application of that ‘lost art’, the historic trade of traditional timber-framing in a manner and result that still has use and application today. These barns, though not historic in age, they are historic in the way they are built. For his inspiration to others who treasures old barns, and for His Exceptional Preservation of Timber-Framing Techniques in Modern Barn Building, the Network was pleased to Present its Founders Award to Dr. Deron Nelson.



Watch the raising of the Nelson Hay Barn with the help of Deron’s friends. Links to the video as well as the slides from his timber-framing presentation are on the Home page and Annual Conference page of www.mibarn.net.

Be Part of Something Historic: “35 Hours of Giving” To Benefit MBPN’s Endowment



Have you dreamed of making history? The Capital Region Community Foundation, MBPN’s endowment host, is holding a 2025 –“35 Hours of Giving” event May

7th and 8th to assist our Network and other nonprofits in building their own endowment funds. For MBPN, this is an investment in MBPN’s future work for Michigan barns—and for our organization!

MBPN’s endowment balance is currently ½ of our goal -- \$252,723.36. This puts us in our planning where we wanted to begin going directly out to our broad membership and other potential stakeholders for their support. Our endowment goal is to reach a principal of \$500,000 – which will provide us with at least \$20,000 a year in investment proceeds!

The giving “window” opportunity will be designed to unite organizations like ours with the community and will support causes that matter most to those communities and organizations. Working together, participants will make history by helping local nonprofits thrive.

Michigan Barn Preservation Network asks for your support. Brad Brogren, Endowment Committee member and President who initiated MBPN’s endowment fund says:

“The MBPN has been an exceptional resource for me and my 30 years of barn ownership. The MBPN endowment is well on its way to supporting the future of barn preservation in Michigan. Michigan barns have served our agricultural heritage for 150 years, and it is my hope that MBPN can continue its mission for many years to come!”

Our goal is to grow our endowment fund—and we can’t do it without you. Here’s how you can help:

- ✓ **Spread the word** – Share this information with friends, family, and colleagues.
- ✓ **Follow Michigan Barn Preservation Network on our Facebook page.**
 - Help amplify our message by engaging with our posts and sharing them!

✓ **Make a gift** – EVERY dollar counts and brings us closer to our goal!

What forms of donations are accepted? Donations can be made online at <https://35hours.ourcommunity.org> by MasterCard, Visa, Discover, and American Express, Mobile Wallet, or via ACH bank transfer. See also: <https://35hours.ourcommunity.org/info/faq> Many of us have given via our **Qualified Charitable Distributions**. This type of distribution is from an IRA. Gifts of stock or distributions from an IRA can be made by contacting the Community Foundation office at 517-272-2870. Checks should be sent to the Capital Region Community Foundation/MBPN Endowment Fund at 330 Marshal St., Suite 300, Lansing, MI 48912.

From May 7 - 8, visit: 35hours.ourcommunity.org and make a donation to us and/or to any of the great participating Michigan nonprofit organizations. During the campaign on May 7-8, you can link directly to our giving page – and make an online-donation: <https://35hours.ourcommunity.org/organizations/michigan-barn-preservation-network> } The Capital Region Community Foundation has also secured some matching funds to complement your gifts!

The “35 Hours of Giving” will end at 6:00 PM on May 8th. If you received this printed newsletter after the date of the Giving “window,” you can still support the MBPN’s Endowment by going to our website at <https://mibarn.net/support/endowment-fund/>

MBPN members should also have received an online “e-news” blast with details about the “35 Hours of Giving.”

If you have any questions or need more information, reach out to us.

Julie Avery, Vice President
Clare Koenigsknecht, Treasurer & Past President
Endowment Committee Co-Chairs

Thank you for being a champion for change for MBPN!

MBPN Adds New Board Members

The Network is always looking to add new barn enthusiasts to our Board of Directors and committees, while retaining the experienced core members who make our organization so successful. At the 2025 Annual Conference and Member Meeting, we welcomed several new members and re-elected some stalwarts. In the latter category were Treasurer Clare Koenigsknecht and Steve Rademacher.

New Board members include the following:

Doug Benoit: Doug’s fascination with barns stems from a connection to equestrian life. Having owned a horse for many years, he spent countless hours in horse barns, tending to their needs and observing the unique characteristics of these structures. He took a timber-framing class some time ago that proved transformative as he has shifted his focus from general carpentry to the craft of timber-framing. Doug is a carpenter for The Henry Ford in Dearborn, where he is responsible for the maintenance of the museum and the historic buildings within Greenfield Village. He also has practical experience working with nonprofit organizations.

Beverly Monroe: Beverly lives on the centennial farm in Wexford County that her father named Monroe Achers. She is a member of

MBPN and has worked hard to keep the original character of her barn while adapting it to be used as a horse barn. It has four stalls, a workshop and bathroom. Beverly has worked with the Manton Chamber of Commerce, and she chairs the Manton Area Heritage Group that is working to rehabilitate the Phelps Brothers Elevator Building. Currently, she operates a B & B.

Melissa Jaskiewicz: Melissa has owned her farm for 21 years and races Standardbred horses. She is, along with others, a founder of the Honey Festival. She’s had fun building the MBPN Teamwork and Timbers barn model for different venues.

Ruth Stahl: As Co-Owner at Stahl Event Barn in McBain, Michigan (with her husband Ivan), Ruth received the prestigious Barn of the Year Award in 2016 for adaptive use. Most recently, she has headed the MBPN Newsletter Committee.

Welcome (back) to the returning Board members an a hearty welcome to the newest members of our volunteer board!

—Keith Kehlbeck, MBPN Newsletter Editor



P.O. Box 614
Mt. Pleasant, MI 48804-0614

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Youngsters Take Up the Charge

Sometimes we forget that educating and motivating the “next generation” of barn enthusiasts is an important component of the Network’s mission. Through youth outreach efforts such as Teamwork & Timbers, we reach young inheritors of the passion for preservation that motivates us all.

Thanks to MBPN Emeritus Board member Dan Creyts for passing along these wonderful examples of young people embracing the allure and beauty of what otherwise would be called “old

Legacy of a Barn

Her beams were hewn with care,
A rich piece of Heritage she would share.
If she could talk, what stories she would tell,
Of sun and storm, well weathered, all would know her well.
Now a Grand Old Lady, she soon would become obsolete,
The death of her future would soon be complete.
But rising from her timber frame, old but sturdy,
Came the cry to save her before History was lost
And future generations would never know the cost.
The Michigan Barn Preservation Network would rewrite her story,
Hoping to restore her in all Her Glory!
The Kellogg Foundation, too, took heart,
Gave them a grant to give them a start.
So to Sycamore she came in May,
The 5th Graders shared in Her glory for a day.
So thanks to all who love her and care,
May she live on Her rich Heritage to share!
B.M.W.

barns.” The poem, “Legacy of a Barn” (and the image) were from an unidentified 5th Grade girl (initials B.M.W.) who was inspired by barn preservation efforts for a local barn. The heartfelt note from another youngster (Dylan) came after he participated in a Teamwork & Timbers model barn raising. Both sentiments—the poem and the note—bode well for the continued vitality of MBPN... for years to come.

—Keith Kehlbeck and Dan Creyts

Dear Farm People,

Thank you very much for choosing our school to put together the barn. I learned a lot about how barns are constructed and now I look more closely on how they are built. My neighbors have an old barn that is in good condition and they are going to re-paint it, so it is even better. I now know how important it is to preserve barns.

From: Dylan

