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Contact: Thomas Nehil
Barn of the Year chairperson
Michigan Barn Preservation Network
tnehil@nehilsivak.com, 269-345-9211

Five Michigan Barns Recognized with Preservation Honors

(East Lansing) -- Five Michigan barns have been named 2010 Barns of the Year by the Michigan Barn Preservation Network (MBPN). Another nine Michigan barn owners received certificates of appreciation for preservation. Recognition of the barns and the work of their owners took place at the MBPN's 15th annual conference, March 12, at the Kellogg Center on the campus of Michigan State University.

As uses for heritage barns (older than 1957) have changed over the years, the MBPN has created five categories within which barns can be nominated for recognition. To be considered, preservation must be done with integrity that respects the original appearance of the barn and retains visual appeal. This year's honorees include the Springhill Barn at Tillers International, Scotts, as a barn in use by a nonprofit organization; the Hecht Family Barn in Vassar, for private continued agricultural use; the Omega Farms Show Barn in Williamston, for commercial use; the Stein Family Barn in Ewart for private adaptive use; and the former Botsford Coach House Barn in Farmington Hills, as an adaptive reuse of an historic structure.

The Springhill barn was built in the 1870s in Walker Township near Grand Rapids. A 40' by 60' English gabled barn, it was part of the Moses Edison farm after he purchased 80 acres from the federal government in 1841. The barn housed Jersey cattle while the farmstead also included a vibrant orchard. The barn acquired its name from an artesian well on the farm, appreciated by travelers. After the last Edison family member left the farm in 2000, the land was sold for development. The family farm house was moved to become a museum and the barn was donated to Tillers International, dismantled, moved and reconstructed. The rebuilt barn contains most of the original hand hewn beams including three 60-foot beams. Today the barn is home to 30 shorthorn cows, 6 oxen, three Belgian draft horses and some 4,000 bales of hay.

The Ken Hecht Family Barn in Vassar was designed by Jacob John Hecht and built in 1916, part of a homesteaded farm purchased in 1897. Lumber came from the family woodlot with some beams being more than 50 feet in length. The "three-hip, self-supporting roof" barn is 50' by 124' in size. Its basement houses livestock, grain and hay are kept on the main floor. A cedar shake roof was replaced by asphalt shingles ten years ago. The barn has been recognized over the years for the conscientious care taken to maintain it. A ramp/bridge entrance will be repaired later this year.

One of some two dozen barns on the Omega Farms property in Williamston owned by Clifford Simmons, the Show Barn owes its name to the animals kept there in preparation for showing at fairs and other livestock events. The barn was built in 1947 and was first used as a milking parlor. During the 1990s, Omega stopped raising cattle in Michigan and moved their prize stock to Kansas. Barns fell into disrepair but when Omega chose to bring their business back to Michigan two years ago, work began to rehabilitate the barns for renewed use. The

Show Barn is 40' by 100' and completely finished inside with ceramic tile lower walls, and tongue and groove paneling.

The Jerry and Eva Stein Barn in Evart dates back to 1883. Originally a 40' by 60' structure, it has a full basement and at one time, a 12' by 60' addition. When active use for livestock and feed ended, the barn was adapted for storage of equipment with the installation of sliding doors, repair to the stone walls, and the removal of the addition which had, according to the Stein family, become a magnet for clutter.

The Botsford/Steward Coach House Barn in Farmington is a 36' by 65' gable-roof structure built in the late 1830s, having two special hand-winch cranes for changing horse harnesses. The mortise and tenon timber frame structure is hand hewn and was part of the Botsford Inn 16 Mile stagecoach stop. Its history includes ownership by Henry Ford who said the restoration he did of it was to make it a "storehouse of the past." The barn was moved intact and relocated in 2006. In its new setting, it has 5,000 square feet of radiant heated floors. Without altering the historic nature of the structure, the barn now houses a kitchen, bar, fireplace, and more. It sits adjacent to the Eber Duram house, just as it had originally, before the house was also moved. The barn is on the National Registry of Historic Sites and is the recipient of numerous awards. It is now owned by Jeff and Sherrie Stewart.

The Michigan Barn Preservation Network marks its 15th year in 2010 and its 14th year of honoring barns and their owners for repair and restoration work. Barn owners were presented at the 2010 conference with plaques bearing images of their barns. The 2010 Barn of the Year Committee was chaired by Tom Nehil of Nehil-Sivak Consulting Engineers, Kalamazoo. Members include Michelle Smay, Ina Hanel, and Tim Wiles with Kathy Holtz advising.

The owners of Michigan barns who received certificates of appreciation were Stephan and Frances Fay of Levering; Paul Hartleb of Port Sanilac; Tim McCale of Deckerville; James Keith of Shelbyville; Roger Mejeur of Richland; Glenn and Sandra Paradis of Kewadin; Naon Paul and Teri Nitz of Buchanan; Cliff and Delores Simons of St Charles; and Gary and Wendy Steudle of Lake Leelenau.

For more information about the Barn of the Year program and the MBPN, visit www.mibarn.net or contact: Tom Nehil, Chair, Barn of the Year Recognition Committee ([Thomas Nehil tnehil@nehilsivak.com](mailto:tnehil@nehilsivak.com)), or Brad Brogren, President, MI Barn Preservation Network. (Bradley Brogren bbrogren1@msn.com)