

Nest & The Gee's Bend Quilters Partnership Impact To Date

September 2022

BACKGROUND

Tucked along a wide bend in the Alabama River is a small town called Boykin, otherwise known as Gee's Bend. Most of the residents in this village trace their lineage back to slaves and shareholders of the Pettway Plantation. After emancipation, many of the freed slaves stayed on the land as sharecroppers and settled The Bend.

The Gee's Bend community is renowned for their exceptional artisanal skills in quilting which are believed to have been passed down through generations over the last two hundred years and their story constitutes a crucial chapter in the history of American craft.

Unfortunately, the fame has not translated into economic advancement. The average annual income in Gee's Bend remains at about \$16,000. Some residents live without the basic amenities of mobile and internet access, limiting the quilters' ability to expand the sale of their goods.

Since 2019, Nest has been working closely with the community of Gee's Bend in partnership with Souls Grown Deep, Etsy and other brand partners to achieve market linkages that expand economic opportunity and the wellbeing of the community.

IMPACT TO DATE

- Since 2019, Nest has facilitated **4 brand collaborations** with the quilters of Gee's Bend as well as a partnership with Etsy. As of August 2022, brand collaborations launched by Nest have brought **\$721,000 in direct income** to the quilters of Gee's Bend
- Quilters reported that they used the earnings for the following expenses:
 - › Financial burdens (40%): pending bills, personal loans, IRS payments, and debt
 - › Household improvements (50%): building/buying a new house, essential household items such as a washing machine and stove, and house repairs
 - › Transportation (20%): new car and money for gas
 - › Financial security (30%): personal savings
 - › Craft production (10%): materials and supplies to help with quilting

When asked to share how the market access gained with Nest's support has helped the quilters, the primary response was that it helped to overcome long-lasting financial problems. One quilter also noted that it enabled her to pay for her daughter's education.

DRIVING FINANCIAL IMPACT



ACHIEVING FINANCIAL & SOCIAL RETURN ON INVESTMENT

PROJECT FUNDS
RAISED

DIRECT INCOME
TO QUILTERS

FINANCIAL
RETURN ON INVESTMENT

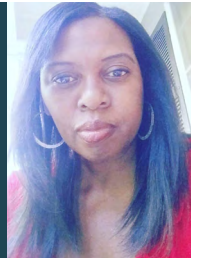
\$180,000 → \$721,000 = 400%

SOCIAL RETURN ON INVESTMENT

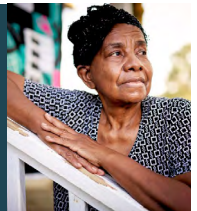
- Setting up 22 independent quilter Etsy Shops
- Establishing 4 brand and community collaborations
- Implementing community trainings on various topics including digital literacy, setting up bank accounts, and product photography

TESTIMONIALS FROM QUILTERS

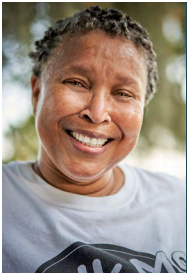
“The collaboration between Nest, Etsy and Gee’s Bend is undeniable in its success. It is very exciting that even internationally, people have taken notice of the Gee’s Bend quilters. To have the fashion industry at large take note of us is so very exciting and beyond our wildest dreams. We would have never thought in a million years that we’d get any recognition, especially outside the United States. Receiving such recognition tells us that the work we are doing must be interesting and attractive. We’re very proud, we’re very thankful, and we’re very blessed.”—**CLAUDIA PETTWAY CHARLEY**



“Combining new materials with the sewing skills that I’ve gained over a lifetime, it’s almost like walking and chewing gum at the same time, it really comes so naturally. The Gee’s Bend quilting tradition grew out of our ancestor’s ability to make beautiful textiles from very limited resources, and so even with new materials and techniques with every new collaboration, we have strong agility and ability to adapt.”—**MARLENE BENNETT JONES**



“Working with a brand collaborator’s provided fashion fabrics is all-new for the group. But, when you say you’re a Gee’s Bend quilter—you have to live up to that reputation. We have learned to rise to the challenge and really enjoy each new experience. Dealing with all the fabric is like dealing with people; the materials communicate with each other. The pieces of fabric need to be good neighbors. Working with a brand partner’s own color palette is new for us too, but once we get started, we see endless possibilities. We are so thankful for each new learning experience we gain through new market access opportunities supported by Nest.”—**LORETTA PETTWAY BENNETT**



“Owning my own Etsy Shop has allowed me to build my very own house. A house that I own free and clear with no mortgage.”—**MARY MARGARET PETTWAY**



All images: Stacy k. Allen Photography

NEST