MINNESOTA native Joan Kladifko spent her career managing rigid grey lines of numbers, rarely able to express her creativity until blossoming after retirement.

Her first business experience began in high school in Litchfield, Minn., when she worked part time after school and on Saturdays. She also filled in for office workers while they were on summer vacation, giving her experience in many different positions. After marriage, Kladifko found herself unexpectedly needing to raise three children – age 6-13 – on her own. She worked for Gold Bond Stamp Company before deciding to become a full-time staff member at the Christian Bible camp, Zion Harbor, on Leech Lake in northern Minnesota. Not only was she blessed with employment, living at the camp provided a safe, supportive environment in which to raise her children. “It was a beautiful place to go,” she said, “with so many godly influences. It was a built-in extended family. The boys enjoyed going camping, fishing, hunting and learning mechanics from the male staff members, while their sister learned what is entails in cooking for a crowd.”

Kladifko said she started out painting and decorating bathrooms and quickly moved up to doing the accounting. As the camp’s overseeing management, Daystar Ministries, acquired new properties, she and her family moved to prepare new locations. It was a property in Martinville, Ind., that revealed her hidden artistic talent.

“We were renovating a hotel in Indiana that had been famous for its mineral baths,” she said. “We were re-doing it from scratch. We worked with a designer from Chicago and discovered my eye for design and color.”

Kladifko stayed with Daystar 12 years, launching her children, until her mother’s health necessitated a move back to Minneapolis. She earned her associate degree in accounting from Minneapolis Community College and started accounting work with Minnesota Scientific (D.B.A. Omni Track Surgical). Once again, the Lord provided.

“It was owned by a good Christian family,” she said, “and was a wonderful company to work for.” Kladifko worked there 17 years, became controller and was on the Board of Directors. But it was after her retirement that life changed. With more time at her disposal, Kladifko began pursuing her long-suppressed creative interests. Before the age of six, Kladifko had learned how to quilt, taught by her father’s mother.

“I started sewing very young,” she said. “Grandmother taught me how to make a little baby quilt for my dolls. I was six. She was a great quilter.

Kladifko still treasures her grandmother’s Log Cabin quilt made more than 80 years ago of scraps of clothing once worn by the family.

She joined a quilting club, meeting with her friends monthly in Shakopee, Minn., where they would get together to share ideas and socialize. In the ensuing years, Kladifko has made quilts that grace the beds of her two sons and daughter. Having 16 grand- and 22 great-grandchildren keeps her busy making quilts for their weddings and new births. Each boasts a hand-embroidered label on the back, dedicating it to the recipient. She said she prays for her family members during the time it takes to hand-quilt each one.

Another blessing after retirement was her re-connection with a former church friend. Her marriage to George Kladifko was “the frosting on the cake,” she said. They “prayed for 10 years together, and the Lord gave us 12.” She was widowed in 2010.

During their marriage, the Kladifikos enjoyed travelling, especially stops in San Antonio visiting son Ron and daughter-in-law Martha. Travel extended to winter-Texan stays at Independence Hill Retirement Community, and this winter, Kladifko has chosen to make Independence Hill her permanent home.

She likes to keep her hands busy, she said, so Kladifko also learned to make meticulously crafted greeting cards. And if that’s not enough, she enjoys puzzles, board games and card games.

Joan Kladifko gifts her children and grandchildren with hand-made quilts that become treasured family heirlooms. This Christmas quilt graces the bed of son Ron Anderson and his wife, Martha.