

# OHIO

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# Barn alert

By TIM WHITE

If he were calling the shots, Rudy Christian would insist that people get a permit before they tear down a barn.

"Unfortunately, many people see their old barn as a pile of cash," says the state's best-known timber framer. "I probably get a couple calls a week from people who want to know how to rip apart a barn and find a place to sell it.

"With so many people out of work, anyone can become a barn cowboy," he notes. "They look for barns in good condition, chain saw them into pieces and mill the best beams for flooring."

As the gateway for immigrants moving west, Ohio may have had more barns per capita than any other state, historians say. English-, German- and Dutch-speaking settlers each brought their own approach to barn building. And the state's abundant forests provided ample material to build barns.

"People wonder what our virgin forests must have been like," Rudy says. "Well just look. They are still standing in our barns. The incredible beams the pioneer framers had to work with were just as amazing to them as they are to us."

### Timber-framing business

For the past 25 years, Rudy has studied the art of barn building as he worked re-creating structures themselves. His company, Christian & Son Inc., specializes in timber frame work, including repairing, or moving and re-



**BEAM REBUILDERS:** Laura Saeger and Rudy Christian have helped restore and relocate many barns during their 25-year tenure heading one of the nation's best-known timber-framing companies.

### Key Points

- Economics are working against Ohio's historic barns.
- Timber framer offers some lessons about preserving barns.
- Recent efforts to document the state's barns are growing.

building historic structures.

With his son, Carson, as vice president and his wife, Laura Saeger, as secretary treasurer, Rudy has built one of the nation's leading timber-frame preservation companies. At first they focused only on building new timber-frame

homes for people; but, in 1992, they were hired to reconstruct the burned out "big barn" at Malabar Farm. When it came time to raise the frame, more than 100 volunteers showed up to boost the beams and 55,000 came to watch.

"From that job on, I really began to study and research the history of barns and barn builders," Rudy says. "There is so much to learn."

His interests have taken him and his family to various states, as well as to Europe and Canada. They disassembled and rebuilt the 13,000-square-foot Crawford horse barn at Longaberger Co.

in Newark in 1998. Then, as PBS filmed, they framed an 18th century carriage house on the mall in Washington, D.C., in 2001. In 2004, they moved Thomas Edison's #11 laboratory home to West Orange, N.J. Currently, they are moving a farmers market to Greenfield Village.

"We try to help people understand that when a barn loses its stewardship, it has not lost its value," Rudy says.

He has spread his knowledge as a founder of both the Timber Framers Guild and the Friends of Ohio Barns. He is executive director of the Preservation Trades Network.

Rudy and Laura are working with others in Wayne County to establish a registry of the barns in the area. A similar project in Ashland County has documented 1,400 barns, and he expects to find at least that many in Wayne County. "We hope for this to become a template for others who want to keep a historical record of the barns in their county," he says.

"Every one of these barns offers a history lesson, and if we don't preserve that lesson, we will lose a valuable part of our heritage."

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