

The Professional Machine Quilter in Washington State

Compiled by Cindy Roth, Longarm University

Think of “Quilting” as a two step process.

- **Step #1-** Create the Quilt Top. The Quilt Top is created by taking large pieces of fabric (from 2 to unlimited numbers of fabrics as in a scrap quilt) and cutting them into small shapes and pieces. Then the small shapes and pieces of fabrics are sewn back together, like a puzzle, to make a pleasing design of a single layer of fabric.
- **Step # 2 –** Stitch the Quilt. Take the Quilt Top, layer it with batting and backing fabric and then stitch it together with thread to make the “quilt.”

For this presentation, the person who creates the quilt top, as in Step #1, will be called the piecer. The person who stitches the quilt, as in Step #2, will be called the quilter.

According to the Quilting in America 2010 Survey there are 21 million “quilters” in America.

If we take the 21 million, divide by 50 states, there are 420,000 quilters per state, of which 26,040 (6.2%) are “dedicated” quilters. (Dedicated quilters spend over \$600 per year in quilting purchases.)

Assumptions about a Dedicated Piecer from the Quilting in America 2010 Survey results.

The dedicated piecer purchased 93.6 yards of fabric at a cost of \$927.10*
(For simplicity, I have rounded the numbers up to 94 yards of fabric for a total of \$930.)

Assumption #1

A Queen Size quilt top, 85 x 103 inches, takes a minimum of 8 yards of fabric.

A dedicated piecer would start 11.75 projects per year.

(94 yards of fabric divided by 8 yards of fabric used per project.)

Let's assume she finishes 6 projects per year. She now needs to have these projects quilted by a professional machine quilter.

Assumption #2

If there are 26,040 dedicated quilters in Washington, multiplied by 6 projects per year = 156,240 quilt tops needing to be quilted per year in Washington.

A **Professional Machine Quilter** is defined as a person who stitches the quilt top, batting and backing fabric together with thread on a specialized quilting machine, for a fee. The Professional Machine Quilter does this as a legitimate business with all proper, local, state and federal business licenses and pays all local, state and federal taxes on their business.

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Facts about Professional Machine Quilter

A Professional Machine Quilter has an investment of at least \$10,000 and up to \$50,000 or more for a specialized, industrial type, quilting machine. This machine can be up to 14 feet long and about 8 feet wide. Some machines, the more expensive ones, have computers attached which will move the machine head. (Most quilting machines are purchased from out of state manufacturers.)



In addition to the cost of the quilting machine, and possible construction costs for the space to put the machine in, the Professional Machine Quilter also has a major investment of at least \$2,000 - \$7,000 in supplies such as batting, backing fabrics, threads and more threads, patterns, etc. Much of these supplies are purchased wholesale and sold to the customer at retail prices.

The Professional Machine Quilter has practiced her skills for months or years before she begins her quilting business.

Assumption #3

There are 2,000 Professional Machine Quilter's in Washington.

Note: There is no firm number for Professional Machine Quilters in Washington. I am assuming there are at least 2,000 Professional Machine Quilter's in the state, there may be more or less.

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Assumption #4

There are 78.12 quilts for each Professional Machine Quilter (PMQ) to quilt per year for Dedicated Piecers. (156,240 quilt tops divided by 2,000 PMQ's in WA)

Assumption #5

Non-Dedicated, or Casual Piecers in America = 19,698,000 (21 million – 6.2% dedicated quilters) divided by 50 states = 393,960 Casual Piecers per state. Each Casual Piecer finishes one Quilt Top per year for a total of another 393,960 Quilt Tops to be quilted per year.

Divide 393,960 by 2,000 Professional Machine Quilter's in Washington = another possible 196.98 Quilt Tops to be completed by EACH Professional Machine Quilter!

Assumption #6

Each Professional Machine Quilter could have a total of 275 quilts to complete for customers EACH year. (From Casual Pieces, 197 quilts plus 78 quilts from Dedicated Piecers = 275 quilts)

Assumption #7

If each of the 275 quilts were priced at an average of \$200 each in quilting labor only, (as indicated by the survey) that would total **\$55,000 gross income** for each Professional Machine Quilter in the state!

Fact: Most Professional Machine Quilter's will finish much LESS than 275 quilts per year!

The Reality of Professional Machine Quilters

Most Professional Machine Quilters are:

- Predominantly Female
- Over 45 years of age
 - Some Professional Machine Quilters are younger and see machine quilting as a way of staying home with their children
- Their machine quilting is a home based business
 - A few quilt shops in WA have quilting machines in their store which they rent for others to use. I know of less than 10 stores state wide that do this, there may be only a few more.
- Have invested \$10,000 or (significantly) more on their quilting equipment
- Most Professional Machine Quilters quilt part time and many others quilt as full time businesses.
- Most Professional Machine Quilters use the income from their quilting business to supplement other income, especially retirement income.

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- Some Professional Machine Quilters have physical limitations or health issues which make it hard, if not impossible to hold a regular, 8 hour a day job. Quilting gives them the flexibility to work when they are feeling well and can take rest breaks when needed.
- For some Professional Machine Quilters, quilting is their only means of income.
- Some Professional Machine Quilters use their quilting business as a means of artistic expression.
- The majority of Professional Machine Quilters have appropriate city, county, state and federal business licensing, collect and pay appropriate taxes.
- Some Professional Machine Quilters do operate “underground” and pay no taxes. Usually these are machine quilters who only do a few quilts a year.
- Most Professional Machine Quilters have worked for others during their adult years and this is the first time they are running a business.
- Many Professional Machine Quilters are frustrated because of mis-information from the state about their businesses and feel that many people don’t take their businesses seriously.
- Most Professional Machine Quilters, in my opinion, are grossly under pricing for the creative work they are doing.

Professional Machine Quilters are NOT just “little old ladies who have nothing to do!”

Professional Machine Quilters are dedicated, creative and intelligent people who are working hard in a craft they love and trying to earn an income to help them live a good life!

Cindy Roth has been a professional longarm quilting for over 15 years. In that time she has seen machine quilting become a recognized and accepted art form which can be a viable, exciting and profitable business. During this time of unequalled growth and acceptance of longarm quilting, many professional longarm quilters have had to deal with the issues of running a professional quilting business. Cindy uses her many years of machine quilting and business experience to help other machine quilters, both professional and non professional, to increase their quilting skills and become successful business owners.

Cindy is a published author having written many magazine articles for the machine quilting industry and has self published many machine quilting books. She designs and manufactures tools and products for machine quilters and has pioneered on demand, online, machine quilting video classes at www.longarmclassroom.com. She also teaches around the country at various conferences and in private quilt studios.

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Cindy is also the founder and director of **Longarm University, Inc.**® www.longarmuniversity.com and the owner/organizer of **Innovations-a Machine Quilting Conference**® www.mqinnovations.com an annual event which brings machine quilters together from all over North America. Cindy was a 2006 and 2009 Teacher of the Year nominee from Professional Quilter magazine.