



Area crafters donate lapghans for veterans

By Tricia Goecks

Editor

STATELINE – It started out as a simple way to honor her father’s and his military service.

Charlotte Kennedy decided to make one 36” x 48” afghan (lapghan), per month and donate it to a veterans group. On Flag Day 2014, Kennedy embarked on her project that she named Sgt. P’s Lapghans for Veterans.

From there the project quickly grew. Kennedy recruited 26 volunteers throughout northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin to help make lapghans. Donation collection points were established. Cub Scouts and 4-H students have held donation drives. High school students made lapghans as part of a class assignment. Twice a month, volunteers gather at the Keen Age Center in Belvidere to make lapghans. Relationships were forged with groups that assist veterans including the VFW, the Veterans Assistance Commission of Boone County and the VA Hospital in Madison, Wis. A 501(c)(3) organization was established.

And on Feb. 19, Kennedy presented the 99th and 100th lapghans to WWII veterans Emery Meyers from Belvidere and to the man who inspired it all, Sgt. P., Walter Petroske. Making the donation even more poignant was the fact that both men served in the Army as sergeants and fought in the Battle of the Bulge.

“I thought it was very nice that she was starting this,” Petroske said.

Petroske and Meyers received the lapghans at a special ceremony held at the VFW Post 1461 in Belvidere. The red, white and blue patriotic lapghans were made by Ann Brandon who joined Kennedy's team of volunteers in November.

Brandon moved to Belvidere in August 2014 from Hampshire. During a call to Belvidere City Hall to gather information about setting up her utilities, Brandon asked if there were any clubs in the area for senior citizens. The voice on the other end of the phone told Brandon about the Keen Age Center. Shortly after visiting the Keen Age Center, Brandon learned about the Sgt. P's Lapghan group that meets twice a month at the center for camaraderie and to make lapghans.

In November, Brandon donated the first of 20 lapghans... a lapghan made of red and white stripes over a field of blue with white stars. "The first one that I made I just made and gave it to her and she called and said we want to do something special with it. I thought okay.... I didn't really understand," Brandon recalled.

Soon afterwards, Kennedy asked Brandon to make an identical lapghan. "These were made absolutely with love," Brandon added.

"It is something really special," Meyers said of the lapghans.

Kennedy praised the many people who have made the lapghan donations possible. "This is basically due to my volunteers and supporters. They have been tremendous," Kennedy said.

Cub Scout Troop 141 set up a donation drop off point for full or partial skeins of yarn, quilt squares and fleece at the VFW Post 1461. Larsen's Community Eyecare Center and Patriot Store and the Keen Age Center as well as The Wool Gathering in Loves Park. The 4-H will host a yarn drive at their upcoming International Night at the Community Building of Boone County. Over 20 volunteers, including a dedicated group that meets at 9:30 a.m. on the second and fourth Friday of each month at the Keen Age Center, make lapghans by knitting, crocheting, quilting and tying or sewing fleece. Chris Corson's transition vocational class at Belvidere North High School made and donated four fleece lapghans.

For some volunteers for whom knitting or crocheting a lapghan is a daunting task, they make 6x8" squares that other volunteers use to assemble into a lapghan. Other volunteers make hats, gloves and scarves.

Since September 2014, Kennedy and her husband Pat have made the rounds delivering lapghans to veterans groups. The first delivery was to the William S. Middleton Memorial VA Hospital in Madison. "The looks on the veterans faces made this all worthwhile," Kennedy said at that time. "I can't even explain how rewarding it was."

At the Top of Illinois Veterans Stand Down event in October 2014, Kennedy distributed approximately 30 lapghans and afghans to homeless veterans. One of the homeless veterans thanked Kennedy for the afghan and told her that "it gets really cold in February."

"My heart just dropped, I was literally in tears," Kennedy recalled.

Brandon was touched and inspired by Kennedy's stories about the homeless veterans and asked if she could accompany Kennedy as she distributes lapghans. "I have told her I want to go and see the gratitude that they give, particularly for the homeless," Brandon said. "I know that they exist, and that it is going to break my heart."

One out of every four people who is homeless is a veteran. "I wish I could make one to give to everybody," Brandon added.

Kennedy is always in search of people to donate materials or make 36" x 48" lapghans. For additional information, contact Kennedy at (815) 765-1172, or via e-mail at [sgtplapghans@gmail.com](mailto:sgtplapghans@gmail.com) or visit their Facebook page at Sgt. P's Lapghans for Veterans.

It did not take long to begin the distribution of the second 100 lapghans. Shortly after Meyers and Petroske received their lapghans, VFW post commander Greg Kelm brought WWII Navy veteran Ernie Mowers into the meeting room. Mowers received the 101st lapghan.

