Quilts of Valor

By Pat Johnson

In just 18 months, the members of newly formed Jersey Shore Quilts of Valor put together 28 full-size quilts for as many veterans hailing from Ocean, Atlantic and Burlington Counties. The Ocean County Cultural & Heritage Commission sponsors the quilts for Ocean County recipients.



(L to R) Members Loreen Wise, Paula Marksfield,Leader Laurie Didyk. Photo credit: Pat Johnson.

Quilts of Valor is a national organization that has its mission to celebrate the dedication and the impact that veterans have made to the country. "Quilts of Valor are special treasures made with love and the best materials, all in honor of the brave individuals who have served our country.

Every Stich reflects our deep gratitude and respect for our servicemen and women, serving as a beautiful reminder of their sacrifices...It reminds us of how much they mean to us and just how deeply we value their efforts."

Anyone can nominate a veteran –whether they've been honorably discharged or are still serving.

Starting the Jersey Shore Chapter

Long-time friends Laurie Didyk and Loreen Wise decided to form the chapter of the national organization after realizing there was no local chapter. The two friends met as surgical nurses in AtlantiCare Mainland Hospital in Galloway about 30 years ago where they both worked for twenty years. Wise left to work at the Rothman Institute and Didyk went back to school to get her Nurse Practitioner License but they stayed friends and found they both had a passion for stitching quilts as well as patients.

Both are members of the Seaport Stitchers Guild and Wise is President of the Lafayette Quilt Guild. Both Didyk and Wise worked with surgeon Dr. Eugene Carroccia, a Vietnam War veteran. Didyk had heard about the Quilts of Valor Foundation and wanted to get a quilt for Carroccia. What the friends found out was there was no chapter in Ocean County so they put an application in for the Atlantic County chapter. They waited and waited and heard nothing back so Didyk contacted the regional director and found the application had gotten lost in the shuffle between two different chapters. "So to move it along, the director asked if I would make the quilt and Loreen said she would help and that was the impetus to start Jersey Shore Quilts of Valor," said Didyk.

The chapter has eight or nine members at present, said Didyk and two of the members are themselves veterans. "Pat Christensen was a nuclear sub mechanic and was in both the Army and Navy and Ann Petronacia was a Navy radio technician," said Didyk.

Recipients of the first few quilts included a World War II veteran in his 90s and a gentleman who served in Vietnam and during the cold war. Recently they made a quilt for Airforce (retired) Major Ed Nuttal, who served in the Vietnam War as a squadron flight leader and fighter pilot—with 159 l combat missions. He also

served in the New Jersey National Guard with his service stretching from 1966 to 1984.

A QOV member, Susan Genova heard her son-in-laws brother was due to leave for active service in a few weeks and the club was able to put together a quilt for Army Sergeant First class Robert David Smith. "He was in the army reserves and signed up for active duty in Iraq," said Didyk.

Usually the process to get a quilt after a nomination can take up to two years to fulfil and the waiting list at present is 16.

Each quilt is unique and many are done in a red, white and blue pattern. It can take over 50 hours to complete, depending in the complexity of the pattern. The chapter has received donations of money and materials and is always grateful. Besides donating their time sewing, members also go on the road with a beautiful display to Veterans groups and senior communities if asked. At these events, people can fill out the form nominating a service person or veteran and can also write a message of thanks on a quilt square that will be incorporated into a quilt.



Quilt recipient Army Sergeant First Class Robert David Smith with Congressman Jeff Van Drew. Photo Credit: Jersey Shore Quilts of Valor.



Quilt recipient Airforce Major Edward Nuttal (retired). Photo credit: Jersey Shore Quilts of Valor.

"We like to give these messages to those who are bed-bound so they can read them during the day and feel the warmth of the sentiments," said Didyk. And though many quilts are given to those who are infirm, a recipient does not have to be sick to be recognized with a quilt.

"This is quilting with a purpose, it's a symbol of gratitude for their service, sacrifice and valor in serving our nation," said Loreen Wise.

When the quilt is ready, there is a presentation ceremony. Didyk thanked Congressman Jeff Van Drew and Assemblyman Brian Rumpf for attending most of the presentations. "They always say something lovely to our servicemen," said Didyk.

To contact Jersey Shore Quilts of Valor, email Didyk at JerseyShoreQOV@gmail.com and contact www.QOVF.org for more information.