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Squares of fabric that will be stitched into a quilt to honor a local veteran. Photo by Barb Mosher

Couple creates quilts to honor veterans

BY BARB MOSHER,
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Tucked away in their home on 40 secluded acres of pine and hardwoods intersected by a meandering creek, a Kewadin couple quietly work side by side in a basement room outfitted with two sewing machines, two large tables, two ironing boards, and lots and lots of fabric.

He's a retired builder; she's retired from nursing. Both careers required focus and meticulous attention to detail, skills that continue to serve them well as they now pursue the creative challenge of designing and piecing together colorful quilts. Their greatest satisfaction comes however, not so much from the process as from the purpose: presenting the quilts to United States military veterans as a way to say "Thank you."

"I get excited about giving them to veterans," the man said. "I love talking to them. We hear some interesting stories. I get a good feeling out of it."

This couple, quiet by nature, intentionally avoid recognition for their efforts, opting to remain anonymous for this article. They prefer to fly under the radar as they work with the local AMVETS post and area care facilities to identify potential recipients. They then make contact

with the veterans or their families to arrange a time to stop by their residences and gift them with a bed-size quilt, a lap quilt, and a matching pillowcase. They thank them for their service, chat for a few minutes, and head for home, leaving behind a wake of respect, appreciation, and kindness.

"They always thank us," he said. "Their families often want to know if they can make a contribution. We never accept anything like that. We're not out to be recognized or compensated. We enjoy being together and doing this together."

His wife had always been a crafter and started quilting about 20 years ago. He had always watched her and been intrigued by the precision required to measure and fit the pieces together into the finished design. When his son convinced him that it was no longer wise to climb ladders and work on rooftops, he retired. But his mind and hands were bored, so he started helping her with quilts.

"He wanted some kind of activity," his wife said. "I told him, 'You've been a builder all your life. Quilting is another form of building.'"

Since friends and family were "saturated with quilts," the couple made lap quilts for residents of nursing homes and assisted living facilities. Then they heard of an organization that distributes handmade or machine-made quilts to veterans who specifically served in war zones. They made and presented several quilts under those guidelines, but soon decided to work independently.

"The military is like a fine-tuned machine, well oiled," he explained. "Everyone has to work together to get things done. There are a million-plus vets out there. We started making 'Thank you for your service' quilts to show respect to any veteran regardless of how or where they served. We're especially trying to reach the older ones because they're passing away."

So far, the couple has made and presented a couple of dozen quilt sets. They recall the stories of each recipient and the details of their service including a pilot who flew B-17 bombers in Europe, a WW II military police officer, and a Korean War veteran who had received multiple Purple Heart medals.

"That was a tear-jerker," said one of the quilt makers of the Purple Heart recipient. "When we gave him his quilt, he cried."

They've presented quilts to four female veterans including one who



Quilt recipient Marv Carpenter of Elk Rapids served in the U.S. Navy. Photo by Barb Mosher

worked at the Pentagon as an aide to President Ronald Reagan. Another female veteran, who served during the Korean War, has a grandfather who served during World War II; both received quilts from the Kewadin couple.

One of their most recent quilt presentations was to Elk Rapids resident Marv Carpenter. He served in the U.S. Navy from 1945 to 1954 including deployments on the USS Yorktown, an Essex-class aircraft carrier. "He was kind of surprised, but it made him happy," said his wife, Roleen. "I could tell that inside he was very pleased."

In addition to the quilts for veterans, the couple continues to make lap quilts for the elderly and have delivered hundreds of them to area care facilities over the years. But it's the veterans who touch the deepest places in their hearts, perhaps because they know something of the sacrifice common to all who have served their country. Two months after their September 6, 1965 marriage, he was drafted. They were separated for two years while he served in the U.S. Army, including one and a half years in southeast Asia.

"It was hard, but I wasn't the only one," he said, "There were a lot of us. Many of them feel they were never appreciated for their service."

And so, they'll continue to work next to each other at their cutting tables and sewing machines and ironing boards in eager anticipation of blessing more veterans. "There's a light in their eyes," she said of the moment veterans are handed a "Thank you for your service" quilt set. "We haven't had one who didn't light up knowing their service has been acknowledged and appreciated."



Quilt recipient Dave White of Kewadin served in the U.S. Army. Courtesy photo

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