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Unsung Hero: Creating quilts for military a labor of love for area woman

By Sharon Roznik The Reporter sroznik@fdlreporter.com

ARMSTRONG — It was a letter from one soldier in particular that touched the heart of 87-year-old Delores George of Armstrong.

A seamstress since the days when sewing machines were a household staple, Delores has created more than 200 quilts to cover and comfort U.S. military men and women serving overseas.

"One young man e-mailed me to tell me it was so cold up in the mountains all they had to cover up with were the liners from their ponchos," Delores recalled. "They are all so grateful for a little warmth from home."

It seemed like a natural thing to do with all the piles of leftover material Delores had stacked up around the house — odds and ends saved through the years that left the grandmotherly senior asking herself "What am I going to do with all this?"

The twin-bed sized quilts she fashions with love are stuffed with mattress pads she finds at places like Goodwill and St. Vincent De Paul, and tied together with pieces of yarn the old-fashioned way.

Anything that gives Delores something to do since her husband Jimmy passed away is a good thing. In fact, she believes her quilt-making cause has saved her sanity.

The couple were a well-known and welcome fixture in Fond du Lac while operating their "mom and pop" business: Jimmy's Shoe Service.

"Jim George, oh yes, people knew him. Our shoe shop was the meeting place for everyone," she



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Delores George of Armstrong holds up one of the more than 200 quilts she has made for military personnel. The Reporter photo by Patrick Flood Advertisement

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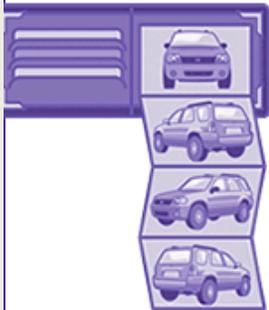
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Her wifely duty included the jobs no one else wanted — shoe repairs, mending worn seams and putting on new soles.

"It sure kept me sewing," she said.

Delores credits her daughter, Maryanne Schmidt of Minnesota, for coming up with the quilt idea.

"My daughter was mailing out boxes to soldiers and told me they were asking for blankets," she said. "She even bought me a new machine that embroiders."

Maryanne said even she can't keep up with her 87-year-old mother. Delores and her machine are going like crazy, while Maryanne is still thinking about what she's going to make.

"At first mom would send the quilt she made to me and I would send it off, but that didn't make any sense," Maryanne said. "Now I give her the address of someone wanting a quilt and off she mails it. The soldiers are so appreciative. I like to think she sews a little love and a prayer into every quilt she makes."

Delores's sister, Florence Brickum, 83 of Oshkosh, said they both started sewing as kids — a necessity when you come from a family of 12 children.

"She makes all these quilts for strangers and treats them like one of her family," Florence confirmed. "She pays for all the mailing, and cuts back on things so she can afford it. We call her 'honey' and she is a honey."

Delores said Florence's quilts are beautiful and intricate, compared to her utilitarian creations.

"Mine are nothing fancy, but they aren't for winning prizes," she said. "They're to keep somebody warm."

Through the years, Delores has heard back from dozens and dozens of soldiers telling her that her quilts are "awesome." She hears stories from them about nearly empty supply headquarters overseas, and the need for things like underwear, socks and sheets.

Several times each week, the 87-year-old searches the Website Anysoldier.com for a list of troops and units looking for supplies.

"I've also been asked to make baby quilts for children in Iraq, Kosovo, Afghanistan. I'm glad to help," she said.

Delores's family includes six children, 17 grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren, with one on the way.

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