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Seamstress sews much comfort for military

By Claudia Loucks, cjloucks@qconline.com

GENESE0 -- A local seamstress has shared five years worth of Sew Much Comfort to wounded military personnel.

Sherry McAvoy has sewn about 300 items of "adaptive clothing," for the nonprofit organization by that name.

Sew Much Comfort was organized in December 2004, according to its website. Mrs. McAvoy, a retired Geneseo middle school teacher, has been involved in it since 2005.

"I was reading a magazine, and, in the back, was a list of organizations that were doing good things for the world," she said. "Sew Much Comfort caught my eye. The magazine gave the website and I researched it. From what I learned, this charity was one that was making a tangible difference."

"Our mission has remained the same, to provide custom-made adaptive clothing at no cost to injured service members from all branches of the military and national guard injured while serving in our current conflicts." according to the the group's website, sewmuchcomfort.org. "We hope to aide in their recovery and provide an added measure of comfort and dignity as they recover from their injuries and return to everyday life."

Clothing gets sent to wounded service men and women at military hospitals in the U.S. and Germany, and to combat surgical units overseas.

More than 150 items went to a single Combat Area Support Hospital, according to a message she recently received from a project director.

The specially designed clothing allows injured personnel to dress themselves more easily with clothing that looks like regular civilian attire.

Materials such as hook and loop tape make garments able to be worn without someone having to push their head, arms or legs through any openings, she said.

Otherwise, the only clothing available would be a "drafty and sometimes impractical" hospital gown, she said.

She'd altered T-shirts, boxer shorts, athletic shorts, lounging pants and trousers.

"For me, the most difficult part is making the finished garment look nice and durable," she said. "I want every garment I make to be something that the soldier is not embarrassed to wear in public. My sewing machine sometimes fights with the hook and loop tape because it is so stiff and unforgiving. But then I think about the frustration of

the people who will wear these clothes, and how they must feel, and I decide rethreading my machine a dozen times or so is not really much of a problem."

Mrs. McAvoy donates thread and labor, and buys fabric and athletic shorts when she finds them on sale. She also attaches a Sew Much Comfort label on each item before mailing the clothes to a Colorado distribution center.

The custom-made clothing makes recovery and therapy more comfortable -- physically and emotionally, Mrs. McAvoy said.

Memories of the Vietnam War motivate her to continue, she said.

"I was in college in the '60s during the Vietnam War," she said. "I lost some friends and family members to that conflict. Some of the guys I know never really got over the ordeal and were different people when they returned. I guess I continue with this charity because I want our soldiers today to have an easier transition from fighting and injury than the boys who went to Vietnam."

To donate

Sew Much Comfort donations are tax deductible.

Money received provides garments, fabric and sewing supplies to volunteer seamstresses, covers shipping costs and helps operate a distribution center.

Send contributions to Michele Cuppy, Sew Much Comfort, 13805 Frontier Lane, Burnsville, MN 55337, or to michele@sewmuchcomfort.org.



Photo: Claudia Loucks / correspondent

Sherry McAvoy spends countless hours at her sewing machine in her Geneseo home, working on garments for wounded service men and women in military hospitals through the Sew Much Comfort organization.