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'Sew Much Comfort' for soldiers

Group makes clothing for troops to wear with prostheses or casts

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Marge Stumpenhorst shows newcomer Shirley Ross how the Sew Much Comfort group makes easy-access clothing for wounded soldiers. The clothing is made with tear-away portions kept together with velcro so people with casts or prosthetics can more easily put on clothes. / TRACIE SIMER/The Jackson Sun

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Soldiers and veterans who are injured or lose a limb and wear a prosthesis or cast must learn how to wear clothes in a new way. Usually, hospital gowns are the daily wardrobe for soldiers in hospitals.

A national organization sought to make hospital stays — and life in general — easier for soldiers who were hospital patients and amputees by making custom clothing. Sew Much Comfort was founded in 2004 and provides free clothing to “support the unique needs of our wounded service members from all branches of the military and National Guard serving in current conflicts,” according to the organization’s website.

Some local volunteers are a part of making these clothing items available.

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Jackson's local chapter of the Sew Much Comfort group makes easy-access clothing for wounded soldiers. Patterns are provided by the national organization, which distributes the clothes to military hospitals across the country. / TRACIE SIMER/The Jackson Sun

In the fellowship hall of First Presbyterian Church, Marge Stumpenhorst showed new volunteer Shirley Ross how the local group makes the clothes. Patterns and guidelines have been printed by the national Sew Much Comfort group for volunteers across the country.

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Stumpenhorst also explained to Ross why the group's work is important.

"We just want to try to give some dignity," she said.

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Some injuries require prostheses and casts that are not easy to wear with regular clothing. Since its founding, Sew Much Comfort has distributed more than 115,000 pieces of adaptive clothing to wounded

soldiers and veterans, according to the website.

The adaptive clothing uses Velcro buttons and straps on T-shirts, pants and shorts.

Stumpenhorst said the specifications for clothing patterns are made by the military, and volunteers check for quality and met specifications before distributing the clothes.

She held out an altered T-shirt with a strip of Velcro down the left side, which allows someone with a cast or left-arm prosthesis to easily take on or off a shirt. Pants have Velcro strips from the hip to the cuff. For pants, the legs for the cast or prosthesis are made bigger to accommodate for comfort, she said.

Velcro can be added to both sides if needed, Stumpenhorst said.

"If we had the money, we could (buy) men's lounge pants, but for now we just buy the fabric and make the pants ourselves," she said. "These pants are something they can wear in public and feel normal. Have some dignity. I saw a news story where one soldier said it was so nice to walk down the hall of the hospital without his backside flopping in the wind."

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