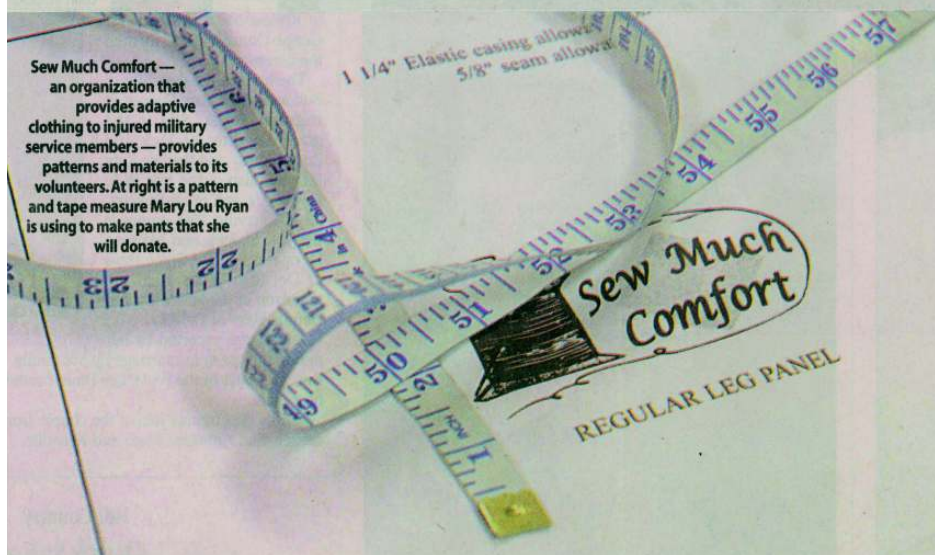


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Sew Much Comfort — an organization that provides adaptive clothing to injured military service members — provides patterns and materials to its volunteers. At right is a pattern and tape measure Mary Lou Ryan is using to make pants that she will donate.

Volunteer sewing efforts give injured soldiers a sense of normalcy

Story by **Carlina Villalpando**
TIMES LIVING & ARTS EDITOR

Photos by **John Schmid**
TIMES STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Since Mary Lou Ryan and her husband, David, retired to Kerrville five years ago, Mary Lou has been busier than ever. She might as well be working full-time, because her volunteer efforts generally take more than 40 hours a week.

She spends her time sewing for four organizations. She makes baby quilts and children's clothes for the Hill Country Quilt Guild and burial gowns and caps, quilts and laundry bags for Threads of Love, a ministry to parents of premature babies. She also makes bonnets and diaper stackers for Alpha Omega Life Center, and her newest volunteer venture is with an organization known as Sew Much Comfort — a group of volunteers who make adaptable clothing for wounded military service members.

Since 2004, Sew Much Comfort has provided adaptive clothing free of charge to injured service members. The organization began out of a desire to provide a tangible reminder of gratitude to soldiers, while giving them measure of comfort, physical freedom and sense of normalcy.

"If no other thing, this organization provides clothing to help these injured soldiers feel as normal as possible," Ryan said.

On Monday, Ryan had begun sewing pairs of adaptable Velcro pants she was making to send to Sew Much Comfort. The pants will be distributed to 10 military hospitals nationwide, as well as numerous veterans medical centers. It is the only organization that provides such clothing.

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Mary Lou Ryan of Kerrville spends many hours every week sewing for various charities. Among the organizations she sews for is Sew Much Comfort, which provides clothing to injured military service members. Above: Ryan sews the seam on a pair of adaptable pants designed to provide easy access to injured legs.

Sewing

Continued from 1C

Last year, the organization provided more than 20,000 items of adaptive clothing throughout the United States and Germany. With approximately 40 injured service members returning to the United States each week, Sew Much Comfort officials say there is great need for more volunteers.

Currently, Ryan is devoting her time to making shorts and pants, but she said the organization has need for T-shirts, scrubs, polo shirts, undergarments, swimwear and specific requests from soldiers.

Ryan said a frequently requested item is athletic shorts. She buys these garments from local stores and adapts them by cutting seams in the legs and adding Velcro to make them accessible to soldiers who have leg injuries.

Soldiers who need clothing often are amputees whose injuries require ready access to their amputation sites; burn victims and those with gunshot wounds who find it difficult and painful to pull clothing over damaged skin, and soldiers with fixators, large metal halos that surround and secure injured limbs.

Ryan said these clothes not only are more convenient and comfortable for patients and the doctors and nurses who treat them, but they do a lot to bolster soldiers' confidence.

"If you can imagine these big strong guys who fought, and now are injured and can't put on a pair of pants," Ryan said. "Sew Much Comfort wants to help them look and feel as normal as possible."

Ryan provides most of her own materials — fabric, thread and accessories — for most of the items she donates, the national organization is willing to provide materials at volunteers' request.

"They don't want cost to be a deterrent for you," Ryan said.

Ryan said she is fortunate because her husband, David, has encouraged her to buy whatever she needs. He even recently built a 400-square-foot addition to their house to use as a sewing room. In there, she works on seven sewing machines and has space designated for each of her projects.

"For me, it's a ministry," Ryan said. "You don't sew for recognition. I don't get to see who any of this stuff goes to, but God told me to do it, so I do it, and leave that part in his hands."

About the charity

Sew Much Comfort was founded in December 2004. It is a 501(c)3 public non profit charity. It is said to be the only organization



providing adaptive clothing to the military service members in military hospitals in the United States, Germany and at combat surgical hospitals overseas.

The charity accepts monetary and material donations, but is in most need of volunteers willing to make adaptable clothing to be distributed to military hospitals. Anyone who sews can participate. The organization provides patterns and materials.

Seamstresses who are interested in putting their sewing skills to work for wounded service members can request volunteer information packets at

www.sewmuchcomfort.org. They will be put in contact with local regional directors and given instructions on how they can get started. There is no minimum time or donation commitment required, and volunteers are asked to have their first donation reviewed for quality control before their future donations will be accepted.

Hill Country Women who are interested in getting involved with Sew Much Comfort, and who would like to participate in group sewing for the cause, also can call Sue Steele at Bank of the Hills at 895-2265. Steele is coordinating efforts to organizing a local Sew Much Comfort volunteer group.