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Edmonds woman sews adaptive clothing for wounded veterans

By Kristi O'Harran, Herald Writer

Merilyn Beck sews adaptive clothing for wounded veterans; one example is pajamas with Velcro side openings that fit over a cast. To think of an injured veteran, struggling to put on pajama bottoms, is an awful thought. Knowing there are women like Merilyn Beck, who sew adaptive clothing, brightens a day.

Beck, 86, volunteers for Sew Much Comfort, which offers adaptive clothing for wounded veterans who may have prosthetics and casts that are too bulky to fit under ordinary clothing or underwear. Without adaptive clothing, the only option for them is wearing a hospital gown. The organization gives garments to be adapted, such as T-shirts, boxers and pajama-type pants, to those who can expertly sew Velcro and bias tape into open seams. Beck knows her stuff. Her husband returned from World War II with an injury from his hip to his knee. "He came home in a full body cast," Beck said. "He needed help getting dressed."

Back in the day, she did the best she could to help Robert Beck put on his clothing, she said.

Almost four year ago, Beck saw a TV program about two young ladies who created the Sew Much Comfort organization.

"I began to cry," Beck said. "I had an instant flashback to Bob's injury and the hard adjustment. It hit home."

She set up the program at the South County Senior Center in Edmonds. There is a tryout, when Beck gives volunteers a garment to sew, then the clothing goes to headquarters in Eugene, Ore., to be approved.

Those who aren't handy with a sewing machine are welcome to give the group money for the cost of shipping goods, Beck said.

"One lady here doesn't sew," she said while we chatted at the center. "She made a donation. They give what they can. It all adds up."



She showed me T-shirts with Velcro strips under the arm and down the side. A wounded veteran could slide into the shirt and then hook it shut.

Sew Much Comfort was founded in 2004, said organizer Michele Cuppy. Not only does the clothing aid in the recovery of an injured service member, it reminds them that people care enough to meet their needs.

“The need for our adaptive clothing continues to grow as American military members continue to be injured serving in conflicts,” Cuppy said. “Each week, the wounded arrive in the states from Germany for extensive medical treatment for bullet wounds, burns, head and limb injuries, and amputations, while many previously injured are still in the recovery process. Sew Much Comfort is the only free clothing program which adapts garments to fit over and around their casts and prosthetics.”

The group sends an ambassador each week to Madigan Army Medical Center in Tacoma to see if clothing needs are met. The group has volunteer tailors in the United States, Europe and Canada. For more information, visit www.sewmuchcomfort.org.

“Depending on the state, volunteers are assigned a regional director who will guide them through the sewing process, order their supplies and answer any questions that crop up as they produce our garments,” Cuppy said.

You may also order adaptive clothing by visiting the website.

Merilyn Beck makes the time to sew. At the South County Senior Center, she’s volunteered for 14 years. At a recent luncheon for the Retired Senior Volunteer Program, she received a letter from President Barack Obama, a pin and certificate. She serves on the center board, is assistant manager for Sound Singers of Edmonds, does hula dancing and plays the piano for B Naturals every Wednesday in Edmonds. She never remarried after her veteran husband died in 1964.

“It’s good to keep busy, because if you stop, you get sad,” Beck said. “Sew Much Comfort is a good cause, especially when you’ve been through it.”

Her heart is in it, she said.

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How to help

Sew Much Comfort needs tailors willing to create adaptive clothing for wounded veterans. For more information, visit www.sewmuchcomfort.org.