

Boulder's Sew Much Comfort helps wounded veterans recover with dignity

By Jeremy Papasso Staff Photographer
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Ten years ago, Boulder seamstress Linda Trumble was reading an issue of Sew News magazine when she stumbled on an article about a group of women working together to give back to wounded veterans.

She didn't know it at the time, but that article would change her life.

The story was about Sew Much Comfort, a nonprofit organization made up of volunteer seamstresses nationwide who were making and providing free adaptive clothing designed to help wounded service members feel more comfortable while recovering from their wartime injuries.

Trumble was raised in a military family, seeing first-hand the sacrifices soldiers and their families make. She also has a knack for sewing.



Linda Trumble, left, and Sheryl Wagner fill orders for injured veterans being treated at the Walter Reed Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., on Dec.

Sew Much Comfort offered the perfect opportunity to utilize her skills to give back. Stitch by stitch, she's been working ever since to help sew together a bond between combat veterans and civilians.

"I love to sew," Trumble said. "My father, father-in-law, cousins, uncles and nephews have all served in various wars or served in the service of their choosing, and I love the military.

"I feel like I'm giving back to these guys that have given so much in their life-altering, family-changing situations, where they come back a different person than when they left."

Trumble started as a volunteer seamstress for Sew Much Comfort in 2005, when the roots of the nonprofit were still growing. She has worked with more than 2,000 volunteers nationwide and eventually became the vice president of the organization, responsible for the distribution center, which moved to Boulder in 2009.

'Entry back into their normal lives'

Since the start of Operation Enduring Freedom on Oct. 7, 2001, there have been roughly 6,826 U.S. military deaths and 52,281 wounded in battle, according to a Congressional Research Service analysis as of Oct. 30, 2014.

Research has indicated that 90 percent of soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines that are wounded on the battlefield now survive their injuries, mainly due to the advancements in medicine and the increased use of body armor.

By comparison, the survivability rate of combat wounds in the Vietnam War was 84 percent and World War II was 80 percent.

So what happens when these wounded veterans return home from war?

They often face a grueling recovery process from burns, amputations, gunshot wounds and other injuries.

Prior to the founding of Sew Much Comfort, that often meant time spent in recovery with nothing more than a hospital gown covering their bodies.

The adaptive clothing created by Sew Much Comfort volunteers meets the needs for a variety of injuries: boxer shorts for lower extremity injuries, T-shirts for upper body injuries, and even tear-away pants, shorts and physical training gear.

The use of soft Velcro along the seams makes it easy for doctors and patients to remove or put on the clothing without causing pain or chaffing.

That's a very important characteristic, especially when working with burn victims whose skin is very sensitive, Trumble said.

It also gets them out of the hospital gowns and back into normal clothing, bringing back a sense of independence and self-confidence.



Chris Bullis, a Sew Much Comfort volunteer, sews adaptive boxer shorts and athletic shorts on Jan. 22, at the Sew Much Comfort distribution center in

"It makes me feel like I'm making their entry back into their normal lives a little bit easier through providing some comfortable clothes for them," Trumble said.

That element of comfort is part of the reason Sew Much Comfort has become so popular with the recovery process of battle-torn veterans.

'A significant and positive impact'

Although the volunteers rarely get to meet the patients the clothing is being sent to due to health laws and military confidentiality, they are constantly reminded through letters and phone calls praising them for their selfless contributions.

One such note, attributed to "Major Jim," is posted on Sew Much Comfort's website: "I want to thank each and every current and former member of the Sew Much Comfort team, for lovingly putting together and shipping all of the adaptive clothing items. Because I received your package a few weeks ago, I can now, for the first time since my injuries, attend our family's Christmas gatherings in normal-looking clothing...

"I am certain that I speak for any service member who has ever received one of your special packages, when I say that your efforts have made a significant and positive impact in my recovery from combat injuries. It is because of people such as yourselves that soldiers returning from the Middle East can continue to have faith in the good people of our great country."

Sheryl Wagner, office manager of the Sew Much Comfort distribution center in Boulder, recalls receiving a phone call from a wounded veteran's mother that brought joy to her heart.

"Her son had been taken to Walter Reed and she said that when she first got there to see him, he was hooked up to every imaginable machine and tube, but she noticed that he had a shirt on and the tubes were coming out of it," Wagner said. "She just couldn't figure out how they had him dressed and he didn't

have a hospital gown on. It just meant a lot that she saw that he was dressed with dignity and it was something that we had done and provided to him."

'Being used by people who really need it'

Overall, Sew Much Comfort has distributed more than 150,000 pieces of adaptive clothing to wounded service members, a majority of which have passed through the fingertips of Trumble and Wagner at the Boulder distribution center.

Wagner, who joined the Sew Much Comfort team in 2007 as a volunteer, has become an integral part of the two-woman duo in Boulder. Trumble and Wagner ship orders of adaptive garments twice a week to locations such as Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, the San Antonio Military Medical Center, Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany and many others.

Supply kits filled with garments, bias tape, velcro and other sewing supplies are also shipped out weekly to the remaining 200 or so volunteers across the country, including some in Boulder County.

"Many of our volunteers are on fixed incomes and are older women, several of which are living in retirement centers," Trumble said. "We send them the garments, and all of the necessary supplies to finish adapting the garments in the fashion that we want."

Trumble added that it's been one of the unspoken benefits that Sew Much Comfort has been able to help to two different groups of people: not only the wounded young soldiers, but the older group of volunteers who have found a meaningful way to contribute in their retirement years.

"I'm really happy to be able to volunteer here... I know this clothing is being used by people who really need it," said Joyce Glazier, a volunteer from Boulder.