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To think that it was five years ago that I sat in a comfortable chair at Ambler SAAC sewing **Project Linus** labels in the blankets that a few ladies had crocheted. I wondered how it would ever be possible to expand in order to provide blankets for just one hospital. But now we are five years old and have come a long way. From that small group of six ladies at SAAC we have grown to appreciate the contributions of over three hundred individuals and fifty organized groups. We have provided warm, cuddly blankets for 14,891 babies and children. And yet, there are still more people joining our effort and more children needing our blankets. We should all be thankful that we have been able to participate in such a meaningful experience.

In this newsletter we want to recognize a number of people. First, a mother and daughter team, the Helen Gardocki ladies (Sr. and Jr.) They spend a lot of their resources and time to make pieced patchwork quilts for us. Recently, Helen, Sr. was quite ill. It wasn't until she was able to get to her sewing machine and make quilts that she felt like her ninety-year old self again. Next, our extension into Lehigh Valley has benefited from the talents and generosity of Anna Breisch, who has been crocheting, quilting, and labeling piles of blankets for children in that area. And finally, there are two groups who regularly make quilts and blankets for the children we address – The Telford Lutheran Home in Telford and The Good Shepherd Lutheran Church of King of Prussia. Each of these individuals/groups has provided us with well over one hundred blankets within this past year. At last year's party we recognized the contributions of Janet Lynch. She continues to make her lovely flannel quilts with accompanying bib or stuffed animal. Her total number of quilts made since the beginning of our chapter now amounts to over eight hundred. What a gift!!!

It's a big job overseeing this chapter. There are so many individuals who work behind the scenes to make things happen. We work from our central location at the Ambler Senior Center, receiving lots of help from the staff and members there. There are people who pick up and deliver blankets; Eddy Smith, who reviews all fleece blankets that we receive; and Terri Chango, who sees that each new contributor receives a thank you note.

Since last year we have instituted a once-a-month gathering of blanketeers who mend and label the blankets that we receive. There are fleece blankets, as well as knitted, crocheted and quilted ones and they are all labeled before they are sent out. The afternoon of the third Monday of each month finds us enjoying each other's company and busily doing our tasks prior to packing up and delivering all of the blankets. There are currently about twelve volunteers who regularly participate in this detail work. If you would care to join us for this activity we'd love to have your help. Come to work, and also bring a project that you are working on if you would like to share with the others. We always enjoy that kind of camaraderie.

Last spring the Community Service Committee of the National Association of Student Councils contacted us expressing interest in having many of their 1,500 delegates to their Conference at North Penn High School make fleece blankets for us. Since Project Linus was one of their community service projects, we benefited from their efforts by about one hundred blankets. We also benefited from the energy of Ron and Judy at their Janome sewing machine store, Ron's Sew and Vac, in Bensalem. On February 19th they participated in the Project Linus Make-a-Blanket-Day and had many people working in their store, making 79 blankets. They had lots of fun and were pleased to join our effort.

We also want to recognize the children who participated in classroom activities which resulted in blankets for us. There was the second grade class at the Makefield Elementary School who made handdrawn squares which a Mom sewed into a quilt. They wanted it to provide comfort to an eight year old child at Children's Hospital. They prepared a note to say, "We are happy to be a part of something so great!" Then there was the group of girls at the Pen Ryn school who learned to crochet, and made a lovely blanket of small squares which their teacher finished for them. In addition, many scout and church groups satisfy charity obligations by making fleece blankets. Lastly, our annual Martin Luther King Day event involving Germantown Academy students produced many fleece blankets. Thanks to all!

We had some special moments of comforting this year. Jean Larison, the assistant coordinator in the Lehigh Valley, delivered four blankets to young family members of Fallen Heroes. Then there was the four year old girl from Newtown, PA who lost her mother to breast cancer to whom we gave a blanket. Each time the blanket was delivered to the appropriate funeral director who gave it to the grieving child, offering comfort at their time of need.

We had the good fortune to receive a large monetary gift from PJM Interconnection, the company that protects the electric grid in our part of the world. Several small contributions have come from other sources, too. It is due to these generous people that we are able to provide the materials necessary to keep our chapter going. We are grateful for their gifts.

Because of the effects of all the above, we are able to continue to distribute blankets to children in need in these local hospitals and agencies:

- Abington
- Lankenau
- Central Montgomery
- Mercy Suburban
- Cribs for Kids
- Visiting Nurses Association of Abington
- Pottstown Memorial Children's Hospital for Children
- Temple Children's
- Shriner's Hospital
- Laurel House
- St. Christopher's Hospital for Children
- Doylestown Hospital

Somewhere along the way, it became apparent that people in Lehigh County wanted to participate in the joy of **Project Linus**. Jean Larison was the first person to initiate contact with us and has become an Assistant Coordinator there, forming a sub-chapter of ours. She works hard collecting, labeling and distributing blankets in her area. Hospitals and agencies in the Lehigh Valley which have received blankets are the following:

- Lehigh Valley Hospital
- St. Luke's Hospital
- VNA
- Turning Point
- Easton Hospital
- Palmerton Ambulance

The relationship that we have developed with the A.C.Moore stores in Montgomeryville and Allentown continues. The blanketeers who drop off their blankets at either of these stores receive a coupon for a 10% discount on their next yarn purchase (one coupon for each blanket). Loretta Zvarick, Assistant Coordinator, has recently established contact with the new A.C.Moore store in Royersford, and they are offering the same benefit to blanketeers who drop off blankets there. Often the stores have a special Yarn Sale Day to which we are invited. We have gained many new blanketeers because of this relationship. Here, too, is another volunteer opportunity: we staff a table for a few hours on these sale days, providing information about our chapter and **Project Linus** in general. Please come and join us at these events. Bring your knitting or crocheting and enjoy a few hours with other blanketeers. (Watch the store's ads about these events.)

Here are a few of the thank you notes which we have received:

- I just recently gave birth to a beautiful baby girl named Lexy. She was born at Central Montgomery Hospital. There I received a beautiful knitted blanket for her. Thanks to all of you, your work is just gorgeous. That is so kind and very generous.
- Just a note to say thanks. My seven week old son recently had surgery at the Shriner's Hospital in Philadelphia. While in recovery we were given a blanket from your organization – just his size. It is a beautiful blanket and the thought is awesome.
- Thank you for bringing happiness to children during a scary time. My daughter is seven and has been having surgeries for scoliosis since she was six. At a time when we are away from family and friends, it brings comfort to have a special blanket to lay with during and after surgery. The blanket came home, a real treasured item.
- Thank you so very much. This is the first thing my baby is receiving, so it will be most cherished. I never had anything hand made for any of my children, so I appreciate this very much.
- Thank you so much for the beautiful blanket! It reminds me of the ones my Grandmother use to make. My baby should be pleased with it.
- Thank you so much for the beautiful quilt and bib we received after the birth of our daughter. It is such a wonderful gift and we are so appreciative. Receiving the blanket made our experience more special. We used the blanket for her picture! It was perfect! We love the cows!
- Over the past few years I have had the privilege to be involved with **Project Linus**. Many times I would explain to volunteers the importance of making blankets even the "small" sizes because babies come in all sizes and the premature babies especially need love and a snuggle. It was not until my son was born premature and had to spend time in the NICU did I know the truth to this statement. What a comfort it was to my husband and me to walk into the NICU and see our son's incubator covered with a bright beautiful quilt. Instead of the scary tubes and wires being the first thing to see we saw this beautiful gift that a volunteer had so lovingly made. Please know that your talents and gifts are truly appreciated by not only the babies but the families as well. With love and gratitude, Nicole, Sean and baby Liam Patrick Brennan.

For all who contribute, it is not for the thanks, rewards, or recognition, but for the joy of helping children in need of comfort and caring – this is the spirit of our organization. We continue to request blankets, quilted, knitted, crocheted or fleece, made of new materials. For your reference, here are the guidelines for the sizes of the blankets most requested by hospitals:

Premie: 18 x 24 or 24 x 30 **Infant:** 30 x 42 or 26 x 36

Please use pastel colors of soft 3 ply or 4 ply yarns, Please do not double the yarn.

Toddler: 36 x 45 **Child:** 40 x 60 **Teen:** 45 x 72

Please use bold colors of 4 ply yarn.

Flannel, fleece and quilting fabrics can be used within these size perimeters also.
The materials used must be new, clean and have a hand-made touch.

Appropriately finishing blankets is a challenge for some knitters and crocheters. Yet proper finishing can make a world of difference in the appearance and durability of the blanket.

Working in ends: It is best to end a yarn at the end of a row or at the side of the blanket. Always leave long ends when beginning and ending a yarn color – at least 6” long. To work in ends, use a large eye needle, then work the end under several stitches of the same color, trying to hide the ends. Granny square blanketeers, who use many colors to make lovely blankets, need to be especially aware of working in ends of yarn.

Blocking the finished blanket: First, flatten out curled edges or corners and square up the blanket. Then go over the entire blanket with a steamer or steam iron, not actually touching the yarn, but letting the steam alone do the work. Patting out edges or uneven or “bumpy” spots with your hand or “stretching” tight spots as you go along can work wonders (just don’t burn yourself). Blankets that are very misshapen can often be miraculously redeemed by a good steaming job. Always let the blanket cool and dry while it is flat on a table or board, so it doesn’t stretch out of shape again.

Presenting a well finished blanket eliminates “extra” work on the part of the labelers. They are especially concerned about how the blanket “looks”. We ask everyone to regard each blanket as if it were being made for a favorite child or grandchild.

Thank you for your ongoing support of our organization, remembering the two-fold mission:

“...to provide love, a sense of security, warmth and comfort to children who are seriously ill, traumatized, or otherwise in need through the gifts of new, handmade blankets and afghans, lovingly created by volunteer “blanketeers.”

“...and to provide a rewarding and fun service opportunity for interested individuals and groups in local communities, for the benefit of children.”

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