

Quilts of Valor Seeking Volunteers

Posted by [TBNKB](#) On 11/01/2018

Lexington Park, MD - In October of 2017, Peg Gowen placed an ad in the "What's Happening" section of her local newspaper, seeking assistance in founding a Quilts of Valor Group for Southern Maryland. Luckily for her, Sylvia and Gerry Lague reached out. Of the Lagues, Peg said, "God sent them to me." The three quickly became tight knit in their volunteer work for Quilts of Valor.

Quilts of Valor Foundation is a national service effort originally founded in 2003. The foundation's mission is to "award healing quilts to return service men and women." The quilts serve not only as an item of comfort, but symbolize respect, appreciation, and thanks to the veterans who receive them. Sylvia asserts, "Quilts of Valor is dedicated to honoring all service members and veterans touched by war." Since 2003, the foundation has awarded over 200,000 quilts in all 50 United States.

This material is used to make a bag for the quilt of valor. Due to a manufacturer's error, the stars were not used in a United States flag.

The effect the awarding of the quilts has on the veterans is astounding. Sylvia and Gerry recall an awarding that took place in South Carolina where they wrapped 36 Vietnam veterans. "I've never seen so many grown men cry," said Sylvia. "It couldn't have been a more humbling experience." One veteran said after receiving his quilt, "It's wonderful that someone is thinking of me. I can feel the loving arms of this country and the quilters when I put it around my shoulders." The wrapping is another way of embracing the veteran, and at the same time thanking them for their service. The quilts can heal loneliness, trauma, PTSD, or any other struggles they might be facing.

Gerry Lague with his personal Quilt of Valor

Gerry Lague is a retired Navy Chief Petty Officer, and received his own quilt for his service. It was awarded by two good friends of the couple and he received it when they lived in South Carolina. He says, "I use the quilt every day." Gerry's own award is one of the many reasons he and Sylvia participate in Quilts of Valor to this day. Over the last seven years, Sylvia and Gerry have awarded quilts in Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, New Hampshire, Florida and Maryland.

Peg Gowen's involvement comes from growing up and working in crafting. She stated, "I can't remember a time where I didn't know how to quilt." She even worked for the Viking Sewing Company for 30 years. Suffice it to say, she is qualified for the position. She likes to tell others, "I have the craft and fabric connections!"

The label sewn in to the quilt bag.

This venture is not a cheap one. Any crafter will attest to the fact that fabric is not cheap. Furthermore, the standard quilt size made for Quilts of Valor is 60-by-80 inches, which is a huge amount of material. Fortunately, there is some relief in that both small and large businesses alike will offer a discount to Quilts of Valor members. Peg also advised that they have recently been making use of purchasing directly from wholesalers at a reduced price. Still, all three organizers agree that the monetary commitment is causing immense struggle. "Most of the costs are coming out of our own pockets," they disclosed.

A signature block used to personalize the quilts, signed by a veteran.

It reads, "Stay strong and be true to what you know to be honest and righteous! God bless you and thank you for selflessly surrendering your life for others and this country! Semper Fi!"

Aside from the expense, a colossal amount of work, thought, and care go in to the creation of these quilts. The design includes intricate personalization, to include the printed fabric of the branch the veteran served in and the design and shape of the fabrics. Also, a customized label is stitched in to the back of the quilt which indicates the name of the veteran, the name of the quilt-maker and the longarm, and the date it was presented. Recently, the group has added further personalization through what they call "signature blocks." Quilts of Valor will attend a major event in Southern Maryland, such as the county fair, and ask veterans to sign a quilt block and include an encouraging message if they wish. Then the signature blocks get stitched into the quilt and are awarded to the veteran. Like a snowflake, every quilt is unique. On the importance of these details, Peg said, "It has to be personal."

Quilts of Valor is completely at service to these veterans. They will never deny a veteran's request to be awarded with a quilt. In fact, they are currently behind by 30 quilts because they simply do not have enough members or funds to make them. On average, it takes about a month to make a quilt from start to finish. There are approximately 12 active members in their group at this present time. Another example of their dedication to these veterans is their flexibility in location and time of awarding ceremonies. One veteran in particular was having a hard time due to his wife being in the hospital with an illness; he was unable to leave his home for the awarding ceremony. Quilts of Valor, with the veteran's approval, came to his home to award him his quilt.

Another signature block with multiple veterans' signatures to be sewn in to a quilt.

Peg, Sylvia, and Gerry are seeking assistance with their group. Most importantly, they would like more members to join Quilts of Valor. They are insistent that anybody, regardless of your crafty nature or sewing/quilting experience, can join. "We will find a job for you," Peg dictated. People are needed to piece together, cut, and assemble fabrics. They work in a fashion akin to an assembly line. Furthermore, any member who is willing to learn the art can be taught. In fact, a member who joined shortly after they began the group in Southern Maryland, with no prior experience, is now making quilts entirely on her own only a year later. They urgently require additional longarmers who are willing to quilt the tops. For those not familiar with the terminology, the longarm is a sewing machine which is approximately 10-by 14 feet long. This machine significantly reduces the length of time it would normally take to finish a quilt. However, the machines can run anywhere from \$3,000 to \$20,000 and so are entirely out of budget for the small organization. If you are not able to dedicate your time or skill, financial assistance is also greatly appreciated.

Quilts of Valor is holding a fundraiser on Veterans Day outside of Wild Birds Unlimited in Lexington Park. If you're interested in meeting them, learning more about the organization, or donating, it would be a great time to do so.

While our veterans support in Southern Maryland may be existing, there is always more that can be done to help, appreciate, and care for them. With Veterans Day coming up, consider donating your time, effort, or finances to assist Quilts of Valor in their support of our veterans. There is no shortage of veterans who would like to be, and deserve to be, recognized.

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