

## Silver Threads

### *COVID-19 Response Service Awards—Organization*

For more than 20 years, Silver Threads has been one of the signature programs of the Retired & Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) of Portage County. Silver Threads volunteers use their sewing skills to craft items that are donated to individuals and nonprofit organizations in the Portage community. They create items needed in the community, including quilts and blankets, bibs and burp cloths, wheelchair and walker bags, hot pads, chemo hats, mittens, and a wide range of other items.

When COVID-19 started spreading, despite being unable to meet to collaborate and complete their projects, the Silver Threads volunteers quickly communicated to take on new projects responding to the pandemic from home. With the need for cloth face masks becoming an immediate need, they jumped into action to provide masks. Rising to the occasion, Silver Threads produced 3,500 cloth masks that were distributed by RSVP staff and volunteers to hospitals, food pantries, hospice organizations, long term care and assisted living facilities, medical personnel, and others. Many also assisted other local organizations to help them make and provide masks that were handed out at bank drive-thru services, food banks, and essential volunteer-based organizations.

The Silver Threads volunteers adapted to the pandemic, continuing to take on the vast majority of the costs of their projects in order to keep serving the community, ordering supplies online and using stockpiles of their own fabric. RSVP staff also arranged to drop off additional supplies to their doorsteps, allowing them to continue to sew their projects and for completed items to be delivered. In addition to masks, the group also addressed the needs of the children and families at the Family Crisis Center by giving each a quilt, warm fleece mittens, and tote bags to carry their belongings. Hospice organizations were provided catheter bag covers to help preserve their patients' dignity, as well as making quilts, blankets and chemo hats to keep those they served warm and comforted. Never ones to allow things to go to waste, the Silver Threads volunteers also kept their fabric trimmings and scraps to use as filing for dog beds, which were donated to the Humane Society to go home with newly adopted pets.

One special project was organized around the local "Spirit of 45" event that had been planned for August 2020 in Portage County to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the end of WWII. Due to the pandemic, the event had to be cancelled, but the Silver Threads volunteers worked diligently to make sure that local veterans would still be honored. They created quilts that were delivered to every known WWII veteran, as well as for several Korean and Vietnam war veterans. The response from the veterans and their families at this special recognition included an outpouring of thanks for the creation of these detailed Veterans Quilts of Appreciation.

Silver Threads is a hallmark example of using one's talents and passion for serving others. The members of Silver Threads love what they do, and their efforts have helped the Portage County community for more than two decades. Their passion has not stopped for anything, not even a global pandemic. Despite the obstacles they faced, their 19 volunteers reported 4,300 hours of service over the past year. Through their hard work, they created 4,200 items valued at \$44,000, which were donated to community members and non-profit organizations. They responded to make a difference for their community, stepping up to provide masks to keep their community members safe and to create a wide range of items to fulfill community needs.

