

Handmade lap quilts a labor of undying love for Garland man_120604

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Handmade lap quilts a labor of undying love for Garland man

By George Henson

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GARLAND-As a living memorial to his late wife, Jeanie, Tom Kelly continues a nursing home ministry she envisioned to warm body and soul.

Kelly didn't accompany his wife of 62 years as she made visits to nursing homes, but he remembers that when she returned, she always was concerned that so many residents seemed cold as they sat in their wheelchairs, even during the summer.

Kelly and his wife always had been handy with a sewing machine, and they decided to make something to keep the residents warm. They began accumulating material, but then she grew ill.



Ninety-year-old Tom Kelly works eight to 10 hours a day producing lap quilts and quillows for nursing home residents. He has made about 150 of them in the last year, continuing a ministry envisioned by his late wife, Jeanie. (George Henson Photo)

All Kelly's time and energy were dedicated for awhile to taking care of his wife, but in September 2003, she succumbed to lung disease.

Since then, he has been working eight to 10 hours most days crafting lap quilts and quilted shoulder wraps for nursing home residents and shut-ins.

Kelly, 90, has made about 150 lap quilts and quillows—a quilt that folds into a pocket to form a pillow if needed. When the quilt is unfolded, the pocket can be used to warm cold feet.

After two cornea transplants and a new eyeglass prescription, he even threads his own needles.

Kelly allows friends in the adult choirs at First Baptist Church in Garland to deliver his creations as a part of their nursing home ministry.

“I get the blessing of making them, but I let them have the blessing of giving them away,” he said. “I want as many people as possible to take them. That's how they get their blessing.”

His daughter, Pat Walker, said the ministry is a testament of the love she saw between her parents her entire life.

“You could always see how devoted they were to one another, and it's like they are still doing this together in my mind,” she said.

She often accompanies her father as he makes his trips to buy fabric and other supplies, where many of the store clerks have come to recognize them.

“They know what he does with the material, and many times they have some they think he would like set aside,” she said.

One of the clerks especially was helpful, and Kelly made her a quillow in appreciation.

“When she took it, she had tears in her eyes,” Walker said.

While most of his creations have gone to five area nursing homes and assisted living centers, others have made their way to Tulsa, Texarkana and Australia.

Walker said the ministry keeps her father vibrant.

“At 90 years of age, he has a purpose in life; he doesn't just sit around and watch TV. He's doing things to help other people,” she said.

Kelly is more interested in encouraging others than in having accolades

heaped on himself.

“If hearing this can encourage someone else to do something and to realize that they're not finished, then that will be good,” he said.

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