

SENIOR SCAPE: Operation Smile

By Sylvia Dickens

In December, five of our ambitious seniors created a bundle of items to save children worldwide.

Those children suffer from a variety of facial deformities, specifically cleft palate issues. The items will help them as they go through life-saving operations



Under the guidance of Joan Levert (second from left), Joan Wilkinson, Grace Rock, Barbara Palmer, and Margaret Shaw (absent) created 206 items total for the life-saving project, Operation Smile, posed here with representative Maureen Atcheson (centre). This program aids children around the world who have cleft palate issues that can lead to starvation, rejection and stoning by their peers. It currently runs in 60 countries and involves thousands of volunteers, including over 5,000 medical personnel. Auroran photo by Sylvia Dickens

All members of the Sew Much Fun group, the women began creating in December. By February, they had made 50 colorful hospital gowns, 55 Smile Bags, 100 No-No Arm Bands, plus a beautiful puppy-dappled quilt.

The arm bands prevent the children from touching their faces during recovery. The smile bags are designed to hold a variety of fun items including toys, stickers, a mirror so they can see their new faces, and personal care items.

Joan Levert headed the endeavour at the Centre, enlisting and helping the other volunteer ladies. In September when she was approached by Operation Smile representative Maureen Atcheson, they were busy creating items for the Christmas Bazaar. As soon as they finished those projects, they quickly moved on to Operation Smile.

The time commitment was impressive. Just one set of arm bands for a child took five hours. Remember, they created 100! One Smile Bag took about an hour, a gown with ties took about one and one-half hours, and the quilt took a full two weeks to create. "It was easy to get people to help out," Joan says. "I thought it was a worthwhile cause. Anything to do with children really touches my heart."

It didn't take long for Grace Rock, Barbara Palmer, Joan Wilkinson, and Margaret Shaw to jump on this fulfilling opportunity. Grace, a sewing hobbyist for four years who loves quilting and hand stitching, worked on some of the bags.

"It's for a great cause," she says. "It was nice to be doing things that are going around the world. That's amazing in itself."

Barbara is a lifelong sewing fanatic, having begun at the ripe age of 13. More recently, she made clothes for her grandchildren and her granddaughter's graduation gown. She enjoys quilting, crocheting and almost any project that sparks her interest. Her efforts went to practically all of the items for Operation Smile.

"It's a great idea," she says. "The items are simple to do and don't take a lot of time, especially when you are repeating everything."

Joan Wilkinson's favorite pastime is quilting, but for this project, she worked mostly on the nighties. At home, her daughter enjoys doing a lot of crafts, which they frequently do together. "It's in the family," she says.

"I thought this project was a great idea. There's a great need. It was lots of fun working in the team, plus the items are going to people who need them."

She adds that Joan Levert was instrumental in their success by bringing them together, then cutting out most of the items ready to be sewn. "Joan is a fantastic leader," she says.

Atcheson, a senior herself, was impressed with the group's involvement.

"It's been delightful working with these people," she says. "I've made some new friends and met new people who are so willing to get involved. It's been great."

Her job entails promoting Operation Smile, finding donors and working with the volunteers. She meets with them to explain what's going on and educate them on the program. People can get involved individually or as a group. They are provided with all the information they need, including patterns for the items.

One item that the seniors could not do because they did not have the pattern was the doll. These are used by the doctors to sketch outlines of the operation on the blank faces. This helps the children to better understand what will be happening.

If you'd like to get involved in Operation Smile, you can reach her by email at Maureen.acheson@yahoo.ca or call 905-836-8981.

Spring Fling

The Dance Committee is holding its Spring Fling on April 5 at 8 p.m., with line dancing practice at 7:30 p.m. Ladies, wear your bright spring fashions. Gents, show off your widest suspenders! Tickets are \$4.50 for members, \$5 for non-members and includes refreshments.

Fiddler on the Roof

If you are interested in this trip, tickets are available until April 10. The trip date is May 13. More information is available at the reception desk.

This affectionately humorous portrait of life in a Jewish village in Tsarist Russia centres on Tevye, a milkman-philosopher who finds his values challenged by his daughters' insistence on following their hearts rather than the dictates of tradition. Meanwhile, more sinister changes are on the horizon that threaten the community's very existence.

Night of Dixie

Don't forget to get your tickets now to this popular Mardi Gras event on April 12 featuring the Jambalaya Dixieland Jazz Band. Cost is only \$10 and includes Jambalaya with salad and dessert, plus entertainment.

For more information on the Aurora Seniors' Centre and all it has to offer, drop by 90 John West Way, visit the web site www.auroraseniors.ca, email auroraseniors@rogers.com or call 905-726-4767 between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. Monday to Friday.