

TEMPE NEWS

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Dolls sooth patients at new Mesa children's hospital

Friendship Village Kiwanis makes gifts

By David M. Brown
SPECIAL FOR THE REPUBLIC

About 30 Kiwanis Club members from Friendship Village retirement community in Tempe gathered during the weekend for a stuffing party that produced 126 therapy dolls for sick and injured children at the new Banner Cardon Children's Medical Center in Mesa. Three members of the nearby Dobson Ranch Kiwanis Club also helped.

The soft-fabric, faceless dolls — often described as “doughboys” after the popular Pillsbury versions — are given to children for various therapeutic functions, said Susan Vosdoganes, Friendship Village director of marketing.

They allow the children diversion. They encourage them to express their feelings, while the medical staff can show the children what will be done during a procedure.

Children also can draw on the dolls with felt-tip markers, bandage them, glue yarn to the dolls' heads or leave them hairless if they are in chemotherapy.

“When the children leave the hospital, they take the doll with them, which can remind them in the future that doctors and hospitals don't have to be so scary,” Vosdoganes said.

“Bear in mind that the average age of the resident making these dolls is 84. I can barely hold onto a needle and thread long enough to sew a button back on a blouse, so I can't imagine what it is like to make doll after doll with elderly arthritic hands. I would say that shows this is truly a labor of love.”

David Nye, president of the Friendship Village Tempe Kiwanis club, brought the service project to the group from the 2008 Kiwanis convention.

The idea was born in Australia, and Kiwanis clubs worldwide now produce dolls for hospitalized children, Nye said.

Nye said his group began making the dolls about 14 months ago. This was the third stuffing party, and, in all, the group has created more than 700 dolls.

“It's a psychological/emotional release system for them to express their feel-



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Friendship Village residents (from left) David Nye, Win Holden and Carol Colburn make dolls for Cardon children's hospital.

ings,” Nye said. “When a child goes to a hospital, we traditionally think of treating their health. With these dolls, it's their psyche that gets treated.”

Added Kiwanis Club member and Friendship Village resident Win Holden:

“We're all scared of hospitals, but children are terrified....This is a tension-reliever and a healing influence on the spirit.”

Holden said he and his wife Alyce have volunteered at Banner Desert for 24 years, so they understand the impact the dolls have on pediatric patients.

Kiwanis member Carol Colburn, who heads the doll project, said, “You can't help but get a special tug to your heart just watching the interaction of the children and the dolls.”

“It is also very satisfying seeing women, and some men, also, sew, working with these dolls,” Colburn said, adding that the therapy extends beyond the children. “One gentleman has a spouse in a memory-care unit here. He sews the dolls and, alongside, his wife stuffs them.”

Karen Santoni, pediatrics development officer with Banner Health Foundation, said three children with diabetes recently used the dolls.

By placing IVs in their cloth dolls, two of them learned from the other child how to perform their blood-sugar tests and give themselves insulin injections.

“Our pediatric patients and families benefit from the medical play/therapy dolls in that they provide a level of comfort and lessen the anxiety our patients may feel when they are about to undergo a procedure or treatment,” Santoni said.