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Santa  
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News-Press

# Fidget quilts

Coastal Quilters Guild creates activity blankets for dementia patients



KENNETH SONG / NEWS-PRESS PHOTOS

Carol Barringer, left, and Luciana Mitzkun admire several fidget quilts for people with advanced dementia that were made by members of the Community Quilts Committee of the Coastal Quilters Guild of Santa Barbara and Goleta. They are among 52 similar quilts donated to the Friendship Center, where Miss Mitzkun is an advanced dementia care specialist. Ms. Barringer spearheaded the project for the Coastal Quilters Guild.

**By MARILYN MCMAHON**  
NEWS-PRESS STAFF WRITER

**L**ong before there were fidget spinners, the hot new toy that is being hyped as an antidote for individuals with anxiety, autism and ADHD, there were fidget quilts for people in the advanced stages of dementia.

"Advanced dementia patients usually crave activities they can perform with their hands. These quilts contain an array of items with which patients can fidget and safely handle, examine and hold, like beads, chains, keys, zippers, floss, sponges, hair bands and even a mop," said Luciana Mitzkun, 53.

"They can use them while they are watching television, having dinner at a restaurant or waiting in a doctor's office."

Which is why Miss Mitzkun, the director of family services and an advanced dementia care specialist for the Friendship Center, an adult day care center, was more than thrilled to receive a donation of 52 of the quilts that were made by members of the Community Quilts Committee of the Coastal Quilters Guild of Santa Barbara and Goleta.

The project was spearheaded by Carol Barringer, chair of the Community Quilts Committee, which focuses on charitable projects for the community.

"Every year, we make quilts and bedding sets for the doll cradles at Unity Shoppe, and we have donated quilts to CALM and Sarah House. One of our special projects was making patriotic quilts for veterans in the Visiting Nurse & Hospice Care program. VNHC partners with the national 'We Honor Veterans' program to present veterans in their hospice care program with a pinning ceremony in which a veteran is thanked and honored for their service. We made red, white and blue quilts for the veterans' pinning ceremonies," said Ms. Barringer, 68.

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**The fidget quilts contain an array of items with which patients can fidget and safely handle, examine and hold, like beads, chains, keys, zippers, floss, sponges, hair bands and even a mop. Many have hidden surprises — pockets that hold small treasures, socks that become hand puppets, squares of fabric that become a pop-up book.**

# Handling fidget quilts helps patients fight anxiety



KENNETH SONG / NEWS-PRESS PHOTOS

**"Materials with a wide variety of textures were used to provide a rich tactile experience," Carol Barringer said.**

## ■ QUILTS

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The fidget quilts, which are designed to fit on a person's lap, range in size from 17 inches square to rectangles of 30 by 39 inches.

"Besides the patches of whimsical fabrics on the front, they are backed with soft fabrics like flannel, fake fur and minky, which is a super-soft microfiber fabric, so they stay on the lap," said Ms. Barringer, who did quite a bit of research about fidget quilts before she proposed the project to her committee.

Each quilt is designed around a theme like cats, hearts, football and other sports, watermelons, etc.

For example, the Hawaiian

quilt, which is 3 feet square, is decorated with a tiny pair of flip-flops, seashells, a tiny Hawaiian shirt, pieces of netting holding plastic fish and bright, tropical fake flowers.

"Themes were used with the hope that each quilt would find its soul mate, and a patient's interests and personality will have a quilt to match," said Ms. Barringer.

"Even though people have advanced dementia, they still have their personality inside and can relate to these themes," added Miss Mitzkun.

Many of the quilts have hidden surprises — pockets that hold small treasures, socks that become hand puppets, squares of fabric that become a pop-up book.

"Materials with a wide variety of textures were used to provide a rich tactile experience," Ms.



**"The quilts are also invaluable for caregivers because they provide hours of safe entertainment and activities for patients who otherwise would be disconnected and isolated," said Luciana Mitzkun.**

Barringer said.

Items for the quilts were donated by members of the Coastal Quilters Guild, which has approximately 200 members, and others were purchased at the 99 Cents Only store, thrift shops and craft stores.

"Most of the fabric came from the guild's stash, or we bought material for the backing," said Ms. Barringer.

Handling fidget quilts helps patients fight anxiety and keep from doing any unwanted activities with their hands, such as picking on themselves, pulling their own hair or disrobing in public, according to Miss Mitzkun.

"The quilts are also invaluable for caregivers because they provide hours of safe entertainment and activities for patients who otherwise would be

disconnected and isolated. They also help families care for their loved ones in their own homes longer, delaying the necessity of moving the patient into a care facility," she added.

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## FYI

For more information about Friendship Center at 89 Eucalyptus Lane in Montecito, call 969-0859, and for Friendship Center at 820 N. Fairview Ave. in Goleta, call 845-7442.

For more information about the Coastal Quilters Guild of Santa Barbara and Goleta, visit [www.coastalquilters.org](http://www.coastalquilters.org).