



## Coastal Quilters Guild shifts focus to providing masks for the community

by Tess Kenny April 27, 2020



*Karen Pickford, president of the Coastal Quilters Guild, has spent the past few weeks making masks for the community.*

Hurricane Katrina, Japanese earthquake victims, the Montecito mudslides, and countless worthwhile organizations. The Coastal Quilters Guild of Santa Barbara and Goleta has lent its sewing skills to causes near and far, donating quilts to anyone in need of a little extra comfort.

Now, the nearly 200-strong nonprofit has adapted to serve the community yet again, this time using its supplies for something everyone's scrambling to get their hands on these days – masks.

Since March's stay-at-home order left guild members without their monthly meetings or usual quilting projects, President Karen Pickford knew their idle sewing machines could be used for some good. So when a member reached out to suggest the guild make cloth masks, she knew the idea was the perfect answer to her quarantine query.

"We're happy to jump in and help the community like we always have," said Ms. Pickford. "We're used to the giving, but it's a different use of our talents."

Over the years, guild members have volunteered their time to supply quilts to not just local families and organizations, but to causes around the world. Yet the nonprofit is no stranger to adaptation. Previous projects have included the likes of Christmas stockings, pillowcases, bedding, shopping bags and even placemats.

With their previous track record speaking for itself, guild members weren't surprised by Ms. Pickford's call to create masks for health care workers and other facilities in the area. In fact, they met the challenge with gusto.

“They jumped on board right away,” said Ms. Pickford. “It was very enthusiastic. There hasn’t been a response from all the guild members because some of them are more homebound and are not able to get supplies, but others have offered to deliver or make trips for those people so they can participate.”

As of now, nearly 40 guild members have lent their support to the Guild Mask Making Project. And while that’s only about 20% participation, the organization has still produced nearly 1,500 masks. Not half bad.

Personally, Ms. Pickford has made around 200 masks, with another 75 on their way to completion. Apart from the production side of the operation, Ms. Pickford also manages the project’s administrative details. This has meant setting up a bin outside her house to collect completed masks, as well as offer supplies to those running short.

Up until now, much of the guild’s efforts have gone towards supplying masks to Cottage Hospital. While cloth masks are not considered official personal protective equipment, or PPE, by the CDC, they can provide an extra layer to health care workers’ N95 masks – especially with the guild’s preferred design.

Members have been advised to make simple gathered masks with pockets. To make the masks more durable, the preferred pattern also includes a lining of interfacing, or a textile that gives support and structure to more flimsy fabric. This design offers health care workers a durable, cloth vehicle to slip their N95 masks into and keep clean.

Still, other members of the community have received their fair share of support. Assisted living facilities, Foodbank operations, the Unity Shoppe, home health care providers, school district employees and even priests are among the guild’s beneficiaries thus far. And it doesn’t look like the requests will abate any time soon.

Fortunately, the guild is determined to satisfy demands, no matter what.

“It’s a good thing that quilters all have an endless supply of fabric that never get used, but it’s been difficult to get the elastic,” she said. “Interfacing is also hard. Every place is sold out of that.”

Working with what they’ve got, guild members have elected to replace the more limited items with anything they can find. Instead of elastic, ribbon, hair ties and fabric have become particularly useful. As for interfacing, Ms. Pickford suggested coffee filters as an alternate addition.

“We improvise and make it work,” she said. “Within the group, I know people are sourcing materials. Everybody is always willing to share... We’re doing the best we can and hopefully the manufacturers can get caught up.”

In the meantime, members seem as committed to their craft as ever. For those like retired nurse Linda Boynton, the opportunity is much more than a way to fill time. After earning her associate degree in nursing from SBCC in 1971, Dr. Boynton went on to pursue a long career in health care – a past that has made producing masks that much more personal.

“I think about all the individuals who are currently working,” she said “(Working) is detrimental to their own health and to the health of their families and friends that they come in contact with. That’s first responders, physicians, nurses, nursing maids. All the housekeeping staff that go in and out of rooms and potentially take home viruses to their families without even knowing it.”

For each mask she makes, Dr. Boynton knows where it will fall on the frontlines. Having that clear image in her mind makes the hours she spends sewing each day fly by. She, like her fellow guild members, have an end goal in mind: relief.

“I hope they enjoy it,” she said. “I hope (the masks) provide the benefits they need... This project is for people like me that can’t provide physical care but can provide a service to those providing a service.”

For facilities or organizations in need of masks, send requests to [president@coastalquiltersb.org](mailto:president@coastalquiltersb.org). The Guild Mask Making Project is also open to non-members. Additional information and mask designs can be found at [coastalquilters.org](http://coastalquilters.org). Cash donations to the project can be mailed to Coastal Quilters Guild, PO Box 6341, Santa Barbara, CA 93160.  
email: [tkenny@newspress.com](mailto:tkenny@newspress.com)