

Tote bags brighten lives of breast cancer survivors

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By [Karen Shuey](#)



Reading Eagle: Karen Shuey | At a session to make tote bags at The Heritage of Green Hills are, from left, Jessie Moore; her daughter, Joanne Downer; Henrietta Luas and Mary Tidwell.

CUMRU TOWNSHIP, PA -- Surrounded by piles of fabric and design sketches, a small group of volunteers who live at The Heritage of Green Hills comes together each week to combine their hearts and talents to bring a smile to breast cancer survivors.

From recycled materials, they make tote bags that are distributed by Jessie's Bags, a Delaware-based nonprofit organization that gives away the items to those who have breast cancer and are undergoing treatment at hospitals. Each bag is unique and handmade by volunteers.

"Making these (tote bags) for breast cancer survivors is a great way for our residents to get together, use their creativity and contribute to a worthy cause," said Cheryl Anderson, community life services director at the Cumru Township retirement community.

Volunteers at The Heritage design the bags by using fabric scraps donated by interior designers and friends of the organization. They send them to the Mifflin Community Library's Stitching Group to assemble. The finished products are shipped to Delaware.

Anderson said the relationship between the retirement community, library and Jessie's Bags began in January after the founder of the group contacted her with the proposal.

"This is a great way to stay busy and do something good for other people," said Phyllis Chapin, a resident of The Heritage. "Designing the bags and coming up with new ideas is a fun way to give back."

Three-time breast cancer survivor Jessie Moore said she is grateful for Chapin's hard work. Moore, 86, started sewing the tote bags nine years ago when she was coping with her own diagnoses. After working in a sewing factory making children's clothing for more than three decades, Moore said she found a purpose by making the tote bags for others who were going through her experience.

"It really builds me up to hear what other people are doing to get through it all," she said during a visit this week to The Heritage. "There's not much I can do at my age to give back but I can still sew."

And now, with a small army of volunteers joining the cause, the organization is growing. The group at The Heritage and library have been turning out about 20 tote bags each week.

Some bags stay at The Heritage and some make their way to Booths Corner Farmers Market in Delaware County to be sold. The money generated by the sale of the bags at the retirement community and market help cover the overhead costs. The rest are given away.

The organization donated 100 bags each month in 2014 to breast cancer survivors.

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