



LIFESTYLE

Comforting the community and beyond

Local nonprofit helps children worldwide, aids in Oklahoma disaster relief



Photos by Steve Crowley Founder of Gramma's Hugs International, Shirley King inspects a piece of fabric that she uses to make blanket for needy children.

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Shirley King and her volunteers are celebrating their 10th year of providing a comforting cornucopia of goods to children around the world.

King's nonprofit, collectively known as Gramma's Hugs International, joins helpers from Elk Grove and its surrounding areas to produce and ship blankets, bags, bibs, clothing, stuffed animals, and more to the less fortunate youth.

"I really think it's important for children to have some sort of comfort or feeling of well-being regardless of their situation," King said.

The group donates the handmade items to organizations such as the Elk Grove Food Bank, St. John's Women's Shelter, Children's Receiving Home in Sacramento, and Sutter Health - just to name a few.

Gramma's Hugs has also supported the Katrina relief effort for the family health centers in Biloxi, MS.

The compassionate group has created and shipped out more than 200,000 blankets alone since its inception.

Members of the group continue to expand their mission having recently provided items to aid the victims of the Oklahoma tornados.

"We just shipped off 10 boxes of fleece blankets, dresses, drawstring bags, and stuffed animals," said King, who is preparing more boxes to go to the state soon. "Many of the children there have lost everything...these items will go a long way in giving them a little bit of comfort."

King's "hugs factory," is located in her Elk Grove home; nearly all of her rooms are filled with sewing machines, blankets, sewn gift bags, and boxes that are ready to be shipped.

Gramma's Hugs networks with other members of the community who can sew, quilt, and help package the items for shipping. Members of the group also own a Lodi manufacturing company that ships the items free of charge.

"Last year shipping alone amounted to \$10,000," King said. "I couldn't do it without their help."

Local residents assist the nonprofit by donating yarn and fabric to help the group's cause.

"I work with several ladies who are extremely talented in sewing," King said. "Every dime that comes in to the organization goes to the materials and the work projects."

Barbara Kubinec is a member of Gramma's Hugs.

She originated a design to make children's dresses out of various colored T-shirts and colorful fabrics that boast a multicultural appeal.

The organization shipped many of the items to a South African orphanage for the children to have dresses for Easter.

"It takes me about 35-40 minutes to make them, and the kids get to choose which one they want," Kubinec said.

King welcomes financial donations to Gramma's Hugs, which will help the group continue to produce more items for the children; she also welcomes materials such as cotton, flannel, and fleece.

"Everything that is given to us in life is a special blessing, so we need to give back," she said. "The more we give back, the richer our lives are."

If you would like to donate to, or become a part of Gramma's Hugs International, please visit www.GrammasHugs.org or contact Shirley King at grammashugs@frontiernet.net.

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