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Quilters celebrate 200th patriotic quilt stitched for veteran patients of hospice

(Pasadena, MD, June X, 2022) — Eight years ago, Millie Gentile of Pasadena learned from a good friend about a local hospice organization's Honor Salute program, wherein dying veterans were thanked for their service with a brief but formal acknowledgement from military volunteers. Part of that heartwarming ceremony includes the gift of handmade patriotic lap blankets. The skilled quilter donated a red, white and blue quilt she stitched and was so moved by the idea, she told her friends.

Luckily for Hospice of the Chesapeake, those friends happened to be the Downs Park Quilters. They all agreed with Gentile that creating and donating quilts for this project fit in well with the club's mission of turning their love of quilting into love for the community.

That was more than 200 patriotic quilts ago. The group invited the organization to the Chesapeake Room of the park's visitor's center for its June 3 meeting to personally receive and celebrate the most recent quilts that brought them to the impressive 200 mark. Hospice of the Chesapeake's Volunteer Services Coordinator Renate Little, who manages the organization's all-volunteer honor salutes, attended with longtime We Honor Veterans volunteer Bill Lovelace to accept the quilts and talk with the group about the impact of their gifts.

Lovelace, who has helped to facilitate more than 200 honor salutes for the nonprofit, moved many of the quilters to tears as he shared stories of how moved patients and families are by not only the generosity, but by the craftsmanship of the quilts. One story he told that brought smiles was about a veteran who immediately took to his new lap blanket. He quickly handed over his old one to his family and said, "Get rid of this ratty old thing – *this* is the blanket I will be using from now on!"

"We very much appreciate that (Hospice of the Chesapeake) takes the time to acknowledge these veterans. That is very meaningful for us," Burkman said, adding that Gentile is an important part of the group's efforts. The quilting group meets Friday mornings in the park to share their love of quilting. Besides stitching blankets for Veterans, the group also sews quilts for premature babies at local hospitals and pillows for breast cancer survivors.

Though some of the members will create a quilt from start to finish, many of these beautifully crafted pieces are created by as many as 10 or more quilters, said Debi Burkman, president of the quilters. Each of the blocks in the pattern may have been created by a quilter at home and then brought in on a sewing day. With people pinning, ironing, stitching and running from table to table, the group can finish five to seven quilt tops in just one day.

To donate quilts or learn more about the We Honor Veterans program, contact Hospice of the Chesapeake at volunteers@hospicechesapeake.org or call 410-987-2003.