

Local 'Hero' offers comfort to abused women

Posted: Wednesday, March 5, 2014 10:20 am

By Annie Lubinsky, Palos Verdes Peninsula News

http://www.pynews.com/news/local-hero-offers-comfort-to-abused-women/article_c9640b6e-a492-11e3-a0f4-0019bb2963f4.html



Photo by Alex Kent

Rancho Palos Verdes resident Leslye Borden was selected as a Local Hero for 2014 by KCET, in recognition of her support for victims of domestic violence. Borden started Handmade Especially for You to create and send handmade scarves to women's shelters. Since its beginnings in 2008, the organization has sent 57,000 scarves to women throughout Southern California.

The scarves are bright and cheerful, soft and warm against the skin. They're a comfort to thousands of women who have fled domestic abuse and are beginning to rebuild their lives.

Handmade Especially for You, founded by Rancho Palos Verdes resident Leslye Borden in October 2008, has sent more than 57,000 scarves to women in shelters throughout Southern California. Each woman who receives one can gather strength from it, knowing that every inch of yarn has passed through the hands of a compassionate woman who cares about her.

"When we deliver our scarves to our shelters, every one has a gift tag signed by the person who made it," Borden said. "Frequently this is the first personal gift the woman has ever received. Abused women are very isolated and can have very low self-esteem. That's why our scarves have such an impact."

In recognition of her kindness and support of victims of domestic abuse, KCET chose Borden as a 2014 Local Hero. KCET sent a crew to film Handmade volunteers in February. The video will be aired in March, to celebrate Women's History Month, and will be shown at the end of the year in recognition of all 2014 Local Heroes.

Borden started Handmade after she sold her stock photo business in 2007. In an passionate frenzy of knitting, she made sweaters, berets, skirts, leg warmers, mittens and muffs for her granddaughters and soon realized they couldn't use all of her gifts.

So Borden looked for charities that wanted knitted items. After making hats for premature babies and sock boots for children in Outer Mongolia, she found an organization that sought knitted scarves for rape survivors in Chicago. Talking with staff at that organization inspired her to start Handmade.

“I thought of abused women, the most underrepresented group in our society,” she said. “They have no political voice. I felt committed to helping the problem and wanted to make the women feel better. That feeling of women supporting women is one of the common threads of volunteers in our group.”

Another common thread, she added, is that at least a quarter are abuse survivors themselves.

“They all say, ‘I wish someone had given me a scarf when I was going through this,’” she said.

Because of safety issues, it was difficult for Borden to find the shelters at first. But today, 60 Southern California shelters receive scarves from Handmade, including Rainbow Services, Richstone Family Center and 1736 Family Crisis Center.

And more and more people are helping Handmade, offering their money, their yarn and their hands. June Grossberg, owner of Concepts in Yarn in Torrance, immediately saw the significance of Handmade and offered to host the group in her shop. She also encouraged her yarn suppliers to donate to Handmade.

Every Wednesday evening, a core group of about 20 people, many of them PV residents, gather at Concepts in Yarn to drop off the scarves they’ve knitted or crocheted, and to create yarn kits, wrap scarves and ship them to shelters. Handmade has 15 affiliates, located as close as Long Beach and as far away as Cape Town, South Africa.

In the beginning, Borden was spending \$500 or more for yarn, but now donated yarn fills every room of her house. Handmade is looking for a low-rent location where volunteers can set up a workshop and store yarn and scarves. Borden hopes more people will get involved, especially after seeing the KCET video.

“We’re very excited about this honor,” she said. “When we first started donating scarves to Rainbow Services, Judy Hessick [former development director at Rainbow] greeted them with enthusiasm and named them ‘comfort scarves.’ She said, ‘They’re like a hug around the neck, which is just what our women need.’ That was such a positive reception that I knew there was something more to these scarves than just knitting.”

KCET’s video on Leslye Borden and Handmade Especially for You can be seen at www.kcet.org/socal/local_heroes/whm/local-hero-leslye-borden.html. For more information or to make a donation of money, time or yarn, visit www.handmadeespecially.org.