

## Sewing buddies become essential workers in McKinley County

Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun  
Friday, 10 April 2020 06:08

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**Combating COVID-19 with masks of love**

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McKinley County fights COVID-19 in its own unique way: sewing masks, one layer at a time. More than 15 women and a couple of men from Veterans Helping Veterans have been making surgical masks one at a time.

So far, the group has made masks for residents of Little Sisters of the Poor, the Community Pantry, nurses, local veterans, and many more for those who need them in their line of duty. To date, over 500 masks have been turned out by the group and currently, they are preparing 200 more masks for the Navajo Nation Police.

Under the direction of Cecelia Held, of Gallup, the group got started by making masks for their families and friends. One day, Held happened to look on Facebook and learned how to improve the masks using patterns. She then reached out to her sewing buddies and the group was formed.

"We wanted to help make masks for people in need," Held said.

Held coordinated different groups to pitch in to help the community "because we care, and we would hope that someone cares about us."

"Everybody is working hard to get as many done as they can," she said. "It's actually time consuming, every little detail, and adding the extra layers. What works and what doesn't, all these are trial and error, some of our first tries were a little on the thin side."

Group member Jeannie Leza, who designs most of the masks, says the group is cheerful despite the world situation.

"We're a fun group. The more people that show up, we can teach them. Who needs help, where. We have lots of fun. We demand to have fun laughing)," Leza said.

Most of the women in the group are wives and family members of veterans. Held calls it a great

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way to give back to the veterans. “Our veterans have gone to battle and here we are now, and they are needing our help,” she said.

Besides sewing the masks to help others, these workers say the mask making gives them clear minds amidst all the chaos in the world.

“It keeps our minds occupied and keeps us busy, even though we can’t be together on Wednesday night at the veterans group, or on Thursday at the Little Sister’s, or out in Ramah once a month. We’re together in spirit,” Held said.

That togetherness is important since everyone is now isolated from one another. The group catches up by phone or, as Held says, “do[es] the drive-by thing.” Members come to her porch and leave items or pick up fabric, keeping the social distance in place always.

“We need to keep our distance from those that we love, so that they can be here next week, next month, and next year,” she added.

As this interview was being conducted (keeping the social distance), a dentist came by to get his mask adjusted and offered thanks to the women.

The group offers special thanks to Brothers In Arms for their donations.

The group accepts donations of fabric, good quality sheets, elastic, supplies needed to make the masks. They can be reached through Veterans Helping Veterans (505) 879-3333 or Little Sisters of the Poor (505) 863-6894.

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