



Mary Pillow has crafted nearly 2,000 teddy bears to bring comfort to pediatric patients at Tanner Medical Center/Carrollton. Despite her battle with cancer, she continues to cut, sew and stuff each one-of-a-kind bear by hand, with her husband, Richard Pillow.

Teddy bears bring the magic of Christmas to hospitalized children

BY LAKEISHA FLEMING
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FOR THE TIMES-GEORGIAN

Christmas can be a hard time for children in the hospital. They are away from family, home and everything familiar. Thanks to Mary Pillow — and a few of her handcrafted friends — children in the pediatrics unit of Tanner Medical Center/Carrollton can still experience the Christmas spirit.

Pillow's friends are one-of-a-kind teddy bears. She has made and donated nearly 2,000 bears for children hospitalized at Tanner. Pillow was inspired three and a half year ago when she had fabric left after making pillow-case dresses with her church for Honduran children.

"I looked for something that would be easy to make, and my husband and I found a cute teddy bear pattern that has just four pieces to it," she said. "It doesn't take very long to make."

Soon, she contacted the Tanner Medical Center/Carrollton pediatrics unit to donate the bears.

This labor of love is a family affair. "My husband, Richard, and I enjoy doing it," she said. "He is my 'official stuffer'." She has received help from other sources as well.

"A lady saw what Mary was doing, and said 'I think this is great,'" said Cindy Strong, RN, nurse manager of the pediatrics unit at Tanner Medical Center/Carrollton. "She gave her money to buy more fabric."

Strong said that the bears make the hospital, well, bearable.

"When the kids come in, we try to have a bear or coloring book or something inviting for them when they come into their room," Strong said. "We try to make the hospital not seem like a scary

place. The teddy bears help young patients make it through stressful situations a little easier."

The bears have also found their way into the hands of elderly patients who need something to hold onto, as well as hospital visitors who need comfort during injections or lab work.

"If anyone in the hospital needs one, we share them," said Strong.

Pillow says all that she does, comes from her own gratitude for all that she and her family have received.

"God has been so good to us that we want to share that love with other people," she said. "That's part of life. You have to give. We always get back more when we give, and we're grateful for that."

She views each bear as an opportunity for a child to know that someone cares.

"Children probably have no idea where the bear came from, but they know someone thought they were special," Pillow said.

What's more, each bear is a one-of-a-kind. "I don't want a child to look down the hall and see another child with a bear just like theirs," Pillow said. "I want them to be different so that they know it was especially made for them."

Pillow's concern for Tanner's young patients goes beyond giving a gift. It's important to her that each bear is also safe.

"I make them with no buttons or anything that will come off, so they are safe for children," she said. She also sanitizes all of the fabric and stuffing used to make the bears.

The fact that she continues to go to such painstaking lengths to bring joy to young patients is even more inspiring in light of her struggle with cancer.

Despite the fatigue of chemotherapy treatments, it was the thought of children in the hospital during Christmas that motivated Pillow and her husband to continue cutting, sewing and stuffing another box of teddy bears.

"The children needed to have something special for Christmas," Pillow said. "Anything that will help their little eyes light up is worth all the time it takes. I wanted to give them my best."

And for Mary Pillow, the best is putting a smile on the faces of hospitalized children all year long.

WORK

FROM THE **FRONT PAGE**

"It's a direct result of the road," Houck said Friday. "Some people want products like the jewelry or pillows and other things made by Carroll County designers but they are not able to shop because of the road. I have several calls daily telling me they have circled the area multiple times but can't find parking and the road is too confusing. They are out there for 10 minutes looking for spots but can't park or go in and out so they leave. They say they have a limited time for a break and that's it. Not a lot of merchants will speak (publicly) about it but we do talk with each other about it and many of us are noticing the drop in customers this year compared to other years."

At least three other downtown Carrollton merchants agreed and one said the restaurants and nail salon aren't as busy since work began at the confluence of Alabama, Maple and Presbyterian streets.

Last week, City Engineer Tommy Holland said the project was a little behind schedule due to the winter storm that swept through the

county. The project was originally earmarked to begin earlier in the year but was postponed after traffic studies and input from business owners.

Now Houck says she's noticing a decline in shoppers and it's been evident since Thanksgiving.

"We're not competing with the big stores because our products are unique," she said. "People enjoy coming in and seeing what we offer. But since the roadwork began we have continued to see fewer people. It was bad timing with the holidays. Yes, we have a long weekend with Christmas but we've also lost a weekend with the weather. I do hope this can be addressed soon so customers can come back. It's just not the right time."

James Gross, owner of La Trattoria restaurant on Alabama Street near the construction, said he has not seen a decline though he has spoken with some business owners who share Houck's sentiments. Gross has been very vocal about the city doing something to improve the safety of the intersection.

"The road work has not impacted us at all," he said Saturday. "In fact, my sales are actually up a little bit. I do a comparable

from year to year and we've been on the increase every year and I have not experienced any kind of decline as a result of this."

Gross said there was a slight decrease in customers when the construction first began but business picked back up afterward. He said once the pedestrian crossing is complete, he'll see how well it flows for that portion.

"The pedestrian crossing is still quite awkward for a lot of people and being right there on the corner and watching people come out of the deck it's very easy to see it," said Gross. "But the overall traffic flow is already improved in my mind at the intersection of Maple Street between Alabama and United Community Bank. The traffic going toward the college has almost disappeared and that used to be the high speed area that was unbearable to cross. I walk over to the bank a couple of times a week and cars would come off of Alabama Street onto Maple Street like they were in a race and so it has improved safety there 100 percent. That was my objective to improve safety and traffic flow. I wanted that corner safer and for traffic to flow better."

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