

Eight Sisters Deliver Cheer On a Grand Scale

by Cathie Hentrich

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Certainly, the Christmas season is a time of giving and sharing with family and friends. It is a time for sharing with those around us such as our neighbors and co-workers. Giving and sharing, however, does not need to be limited to those closest to us. The true spirit of Christmas can be expressed in helping those persons with whom we have never met; with whom we will never see. It is giving to those that are not as fortunate in their lives as we are in ours.

One local family embodies this true spirit of Christmas.

The Renken sisters, all eight of them, (Lois Dipazo, Jan Bode, Barb Johnson, Audrey Daberkow, Carol Bollmann, Lisa Renken, Sandy Wilson, and one sister-in-law, Helen Meyer) may never meet those that they brought joy to through their selfless acts and they may never receive a thank you card, but recognition is not why these ladies do what they do. They are a group of women that believe in serving others in need and serving their communities.

These women are not strangers to heartache themselves, they've recently lost their mother, an infant nephew, and a sister, but they continue to honor those they have lost by loving others.

The icing on the cake? Working together towards a common cause helps maintain a strong sister-bond!

Their service has been diverse in nature and is always relevant to the needs of those around them. Over the past few years, the sisters have spent countless hours working on special projects for those in need.

The story began as a way for the sisters to visit together, but those visits and "gab" sessions turned into something beautiful.

Lutheran World Relief was the first recipient. The team of sisters planned to get together the last Thursday of each month and make quilt tops, which quickly turned into 60 completed quilts for the organization. Even Audrey, one of the sisters living in Colorado, contributed by cutting and sewing many of the quilt blocks and delivering them to Illinois.

The acts of service then moved to a local focus and Alton Memorial Hospital was the next lucky organization. The team began making denim blankets for patients, in honor of their two sisters who themselves had been diagnosed with cancer and were always cold due to the invasiveness of their own cancer treatments.

Then the pandemic hit, but the stay-at-home order did not stop the sisters. "Carol, Lisa, and Helen would cut the squares, put them in Ziploc bags, and place them on another sister's porch to sew. This went back and forth until we were able to complete them," said Sandy Wilson.

After losing a newborn nephew, the team of sisters began making baby hats, but the process was slow and tedious. The Renken sisters again showed their resourcefulness and utilized a program called Thrivent which provided funds for yarn and looms. The ladies made 325 newborn hats, but have not been able to deliver them due to hospital Covid restrictions.

In the meantime, the Renken sisters have made 35 masks for Zion Lutheran Church, 125 masks for Lutheran Child & Family Services, and 65 pillows for breast surgery patients in Pueblo, Colorado, which were delivered to St. Mary Corwin Medical Center in Colorado by two of the sisters, Barb and Lois.

“Our next project for Alton Memorial Hospital is going to be making stuffed bears,” said Sandy Wilson.

The Renken sisters are representative of most women in our area - they hold jobs, they take care of families, they have multiple outside commitments, but collectively they find time to reach out to those in need. You see, they have serving hearts – great big serving hearts! In turn, they continue to strengthen their sister-bond by working together towards a mutual, altruistic goal. Because of these beautiful women, the world just keeps getting a little brighter.

If you are interested in a volunteer opportunity, visit:

<https://www.volunteermatch.org/post>

Volunteer Match is an organization that connects interested volunteers with area non-profits.



