
MIZZOU

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Around the Columns

Common threads

Stitching almost seems secondary during the sewing circle at [TigerPlace](#), a 33-unit retirement community in Columbia affiliated with MU's [Sinclair School of Nursing](#).

sewing ladies

Barb Levy, right, regales TigerPlace residents with bawdy jokes. Photo by Nicholas Benner.

One summer afternoon finds several residents gossiping and giggling as they gather in the central sitting room to stuff batting into fleece cats. Volunteer Barb Levy reads randy jokes printed off the Internet while volunteer Gerri Moore passes out thick slices of chocolate truffle loaf and an attendant distributes steaming coffee.

Resident Deena Crow, wielding pinking shears, notices the group is missing a regular participant and dispatches a staff member to fetch her.

Nursing Professor Marilyn Rantz, who launched the sewing circle in 2006, acts as the group's ringleader. She keeps several projects rolling simultaneously and interjects the occasional story, prompting more peals of laughter.




The stuffed cats are destined for [Pascale's Pals](#), a nonprofit organization that supplies comfort items for young patients at the University's Children's Hospital. Besides the cats, this afternoon's project is to finish a teddy bear cut from the favorite shirt of a recently deceased TigerPlace resident, along with two fur bears for nursing Dean Rose Porter. Sewing circle members crafted these bears for Porter's grandchildren from a mink coat that belonged to Porter's mother. Another of their bears recently fetched \$300 at a fundraising auction for MU's College of Veterinary Medicine.

Resident Dorothy Trotter, the missing seamstress, shows up. She had nodded off while watching a St. Louis Cardinals game but is eager to show off a sack of donated scraps she will patch into quilts for sick children. She unfurls a baby quilt decorated with cats. She has been sewing its binding by hand. "It's a lot of stitching," Trotter says cheerfully, "but what else do I have to do?"

Rantz digs through a bag of plastic safety eyes and noses, then settles in to sew jointed bear limbs with a curved needle, using a hemostat to tug the needle through the thick material.

Amid the bustle and bawdy language, one resident sits quietly wearing a faint smile, with a mound of polyester fluff and her pocketbook on her lap, while another resident rolls by in a wheelchair and wags a finger at the giggling group. “I could hear you all the way down in my room.”

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