

# Leave it to weavers

Holiday Village Blanketeers know how to brighten students' day

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PEMBERTON TOWNSHIP — Each hat, mitten and scarf was made with special care. That's just how the Holiday Village Blanketeers roll.

The Blanketeers are a group of seniors from Mount Laurel Holiday Village, and they spent the last year creating the winter attire for the 3- and 4-year-old students at the Pemberton Early Childhood Education Center.

"This wonderful intergenerational event, linking old and young, and school and community, (brought) together students and residents for a unique morning of kindness and camaraderie," Jeannie Mignella, spokeswoman for the township school district, said in an email.

About 10 Blanketeers personally delivered the gifts on Friday to the students, with the help of a few district vans.

The group makes hats and scarves year-round for children and adults, but last year one of the members, whose daughter, Deborah Ceplo, is the education center's principal, suggested that they make items specifically for the students, according to Jill McDonald, the Blanketeers' chairwoman.

"When I met with them at their November meeting at the Mount Laurel clubhouse, they expressed an interest in visiting (the center) to see the looks on the children's faces as they received their handmade gifts," Ceplo said in an email. "We worked with our transportation department to arrange for a bus to pick them up and bring them out to Pemberton for a few hours."

The education center provides full-day preschool for over 500 3- and 4-year-olds from the township, Pemberton Borough and Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst.

"A lot of the children in the Pemberton schools are from Fort Dix (a part of the joint base), and my husband is retired military and my son is active-duty military. So anything that has to do with the military, I'm quite in to," McDonald said.

The Blanketeers also wanted to specifically help students from low-income families who might not get a lot of gifts during the holidays.

Ceplo said the event helps to build relationships between the students and the community.

"This event continues to strengthen our early childhood community connections, while also providing a sense of fulfillment for the adults involved," she said. "We are committed to strengthening family relationships and want to build and strengthen intergenerational relationships through activities as such."



Pat Wyszynski, a member of the Holiday Village Blanketeers in Mount Laurel, reads the story "The Mitten," by Jan Brett. (NANCY ROKOS / STAFF PHOTOJOURNALIST)



Madison Volkes, 3, a student at the Pemberton Early Childhood Education Center, wears a handmade hat, scarf and mittens that were created by seniors of the Holiday Village Blanketeers of Mount Laurel and given out to the students on Friday.



Brianna Pittman, 5, a student at the Pemberton Early Childhood Education Center, gets a lesson on crocheting from Pat Wyszynski, a member of the Holiday Village Blanketeers, during the senior group's to the center on Friday.



Jill McDonald, chairwoman of the Holiday Village Blanketeers, shows Jack Fittler, 4, how to crochet.



Giovanni Figueroa, 4, gets help from Pat Wyszynski, a member of the Holiday Village Blanketeers in Mount Laurel, in putting on his handmade items created by the seniors.