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Get to know... Marcy Dawkins

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GET TO KNOW...

Marcy Dawkins

Age: 72

Family: Husband, Stephen; five grown children, eight grandchildren, five great-grandchildren (and another on the way)

Volunteers with Hug-A-Bear

To help, call Dawkins at 445-0715.

She makes bad times bearable for children

Just about every night, come "Wheel of Fortune" time, friends and family know where to find Marcy Dawkins.

The 72-year-old mother of five will be in the living room, working with her husband, Stephen, on crafting bags full of bears.

For each bear, Dawkins carefully pulls a needle and thread through the 2-inch opening on the bottom of the nearly completed teddy bear.

Once she closes up each stuffed bear, her husband bundles them in clear plastic bags, and the two deliver them to agencies that help children throughout Omaha.

"If you see how the children look," Dawkins said, "it's something you just can't explain."

She took over leadership of the project, called Hug-a-Bear, in 2000. Before that, the project had slowed and not many bears were being made, she said.

Hug-A-Bear is a project of the Heartland Council of Telecom Pioneers, a group of current and former telecommunications industry employees and their families who volunteer to address community needs.

It's a lot of work - Dawkins spends about five hours a night working on the bears - but it's a labor of love.

About 13 volunteers help make the teddy bears. They meet for four hours every Tuesday morning at the Douglas/Sarpy County Extension Office, and many take work home with them.

The bears are made of Vellux blankets that Dawkins orders. She can make 40 bears from one king-sized blanket, she said. She buys the blankets because she can't find the fabric, and other material such as fleece is too difficult to work with.

In all, the volunteers put in about 2,500 hours a month to make about 350 bears. In the past eight years, they have given out nearly 17,000 bears, she said.

The Dawkinses donate bears monthly to Children's Hospital, Bergan Mercy and Immanuel Medical Centers, the Douglas County Sheriff's Office and Project Harmony, which works to help children who have been abused. They also provide bears to a handful of other agencies upon request.

"I like to sew and I like bears and I just like making children happy," Dawkins said. "This is the biggest thing I've ever done."