



## CORONAVIRUS

# Community sews homemade face masks

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By Matthew Nash

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SEQUIM — A community that stitches together sticks together.

That's been an unofficial motto for community members across the North Olympic Peninsula as they've rallied to create thousands of face masks and guards for first responders, health officials and others in light of the COVID-19 outbreak.

They answered a call by such health officials as Dr. Allison Berry Unthank, Clallam County health officer, and Dr. Tom Locke, Jefferson County health officer, seeking homemade masks and gowns to serve as personal protection equipment (PPEs) for health care workers.

"We're still in critical need of PPEs," said Peter Raiswell, public information officer for the Clallam County Emergency Management Team.

As of Friday, the national Centers for Disease Control also has recommended that all residents wear face masks to slow the spread of the unique coronavirus.

In Sequim, co-founders of the Facebook group [Sequim Face Masks Challenge](#) Jim Stoffer and Monica Dixon said it started with their mutual friend Brian Jackson, owner of Home Instead Senior Care, asking if they knew anyone who could sew masks for his employees.

"I knew we could do it, so from there it was a matter of how do we manage it," Stoffer said.

He texted Dixon, which she said felt like a game of Tag and that it was a matter of finding out who to seek help from next including local sewing groups, friends, family and complete strangers.

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The online group formed the next morning as Dixon and Stoffer began reaching out to private endeavors to see how they could come together for the community.



#### Team effort

Donations have come in from across the area and state, including Shipley Center, multiple churches and individual quilters.

“We have such a gold mine in this community of support,” Dixon said.

“It’s a testament to the people on the Peninsula because we know we’re at the end of the world and we’re going to have to act like Apollo 13 or MacGyver to make it work,” Stoffer said.

Randy Perry, owner of Sequim Shoe Repair, was one of many individuals to step up. He gave 40 yards of elastic and sold another 40 yards at cost to Tara Velarde, a key mask maker in Sequim, and another 20 yards to Stoffer.

Stoffer, a Sequim School Board member, also reached out to an acquaintance, Bernie O’Donnell, who worked on the school district’s central kitchen project, to see if he could find mask-making supplies.

O’Donnell, who operates his new business Rock Project Management in Renton, said his team paid for thousands of ties, bands and other items for masks. Supplies were delivered later that day and handed out at Trinity United Methodist Church, Stoffer said.

“It made everyone feel pretty dog-gone good,” O’Donnell said of his team. “It was really amazing how all the employees came together.”



#### Drop-off, pick-up

Efforts are continuing across Clallam and Jefferson counties.

Sequim residents have supply pickup and masks/gown drop-off options at Trinity United Methodist Church, 100 S. Blake Ave.; Sequim Community Church, 950 N. Fifth Ave.; Sound Community Bank, 645 W. Washington St.; and Greywolf Elementary School, 171 Carlsborg Road.

In Port Angeles, residents are bringing masks and other protective gear to the Emergency Operations Center at the Clallam County Courthouse, 223 E. Fourth St. A Volunteer and Donation Center is open at the Vern Burton Community Center from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Four mask drop boxes await donations in Jefferson County: outside the Jefferson County Library, 620 Cedar Ave., Port Hadlock; outside the Port Townsend Public Library, 1220 Lawrence St., Port Townsend; Food Coop book drop at 414 Kearney St., Port Townsend; and Quilcene Community Center book drop at 294952 U.S. Highway 101, Quilcene.

Mask guidelines can be found at [www.deaconess.com/How-to-make-a-Face-Mask](http://www.deaconess.com/How-to-make-a-Face-Mask) in Clallam County. In Jefferson County they are at [co.jefferson.wa.us](http://co.jefferson.wa.us); type “community mask project” into the search box at the top of the home page.

Organizers ask participants to wash masks and gowns and place them in Ziploc bags with the number of items as well as one’s name and contact information on the outside, to minimize exposure. In Clallam County, Stoffer said, the items will be sent to Clallam County for sterilization again.

Jackson said the masks Home Instead received “not only provide the additional protection to our staff, it also allows us to limit exposure as we pick up prescriptions, groceries, and run other errands for our clients ... that will help them through this difficult time.”

Dixon said they are aware the masks they are making aren’t filtering out as much as high-end N95 masks. It’s filtering out about 50-60 percent of particulates, and that’s better than nothing many people are using now, she said.

Some medical professionals are using them in conjunction with N95 masks so that they can use the higher-end masks longer, Stoffer said.



#### Sew from home

In Carlsborg, Tara Velarde and her roommate Debbie made more than 300 masks in a about 10 days. She was watching the news and kept feeling anxiety and the need to turn her attention elsewhere.

Velarde said a personal Facebook post was shared around the community bringing in mask requests from plumbers, pharmacy workers and many more.

“I’m not a sewer by any means,” Velarde said.

The only sewing she did before this was celebratory graduation hats, she said.

“I started with the fabric I had sitting around home and the donations have been amazing,” Velarde said.

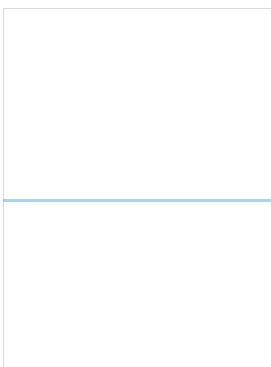
She’s used donated cash and gift cards to purchase fabric and supplies for masks.

The reality of the pandemic hit her hard, Velarde said, when she went into Jo-Ann Fabrics in Port Angeles last week and saw a sheriff’s office deputy buying a sewing machine and cotton.

“He said that was what he was going to be doing in his own time,” she said.

Her goal is to finish 500 masks for personal requests and then partner with the Sequim Face Masks Challenge group.

“It’s amazing how much our community has come together over this,” she said.



Heidi Sellers-Krzyworz, a member of the Facebook group, said she saw the post for the group and felt it was something she and her daughter Paige could do together.

She said the project has “given the two of us some great mother daughter time,” helped teach Paige some basic sewing skills, and provided an opportunity to support the community.

“The funny thing is I was given a whole bunch of fabric before Christmas and had only used a small portion of what was given to me,” Sellers-Krzyworz said.

“I was going to donate the rest to the Serenity House, but Paige said to keep it because we are going to need it for something important. She was right!”

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