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Sunday, April 10, 2005

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**Comfort vs. cancer**

By DAN MCGILLVRAY  
 Staff Writer

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By DAN MCGILLVRAY

Staff Writer

Rose Wade helps cancer patients by covering their heads with soft, comfortable caps.

At 92, the Mount Vernon resident has knitted more than 120 "chemocaps" for men, women and children who require chemotherapy to fight cancer that inhabits their bodies. Powerful chemotherapy drugs kill cancer, but also attack other cells, including those that sprout hair.

"I've been doing them since December and everything is made with love. As long as they need them, I'll keep doing them," Wade said.

She gives the caps to Maranacook Yarns in Readfield -- a small, home-based business on South

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Road that also serves as the central Maine chapter for ChemoCaps.

ChemoCaps is a national organization of knitters and crocheters that donates caps to hospitals and health-care facilities throughout the country.

Gari Smith-Bayreuther, who owns Maranacook Yarns in readfield, said 40 to 50 local volunteers are producing caps.

"They need to be washable and soft and seamless. They can be a wool blend or acrylic," she said. The finished products have been sent to seven local hospitals -- including MaineGeneral Medical Center in Augusta and Waterville, and Franklin Memorial Hospital in Farmington -- since the chapter formed last October.

ChemoCaps was founded in Pennsylvania by Ronni Lynn Spoll after her daughter, Heather, died of cancer when at 25.

"Wherever you live, somewhere in your community there are cancer patients in need of hand-knit chemocaps. Get together with other knitters, get school groups, Scouts and other young people involved," reads a section of the ChemoCaps Web site.

Patricia Ender of Wayne, who also knits caps for Maranacook Yarns, tries to finish one a week.

"I started in early October and I've done over 30 caps. I have had a number of friends who have had cancer and have not lived. I thought this was such a good project. It made me feel like I could do something good for people," she said.

Ender and Wade each said they intend to keep turning out the caps as long as the need exists.

Smith-Bayreuther, who worked as a nurse before starting the home business last September, got the word out last fall that she needed volunteers to knit and crochet caps.

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"I had no idea what the response would be like. It's been awe-inspiring, the people who have come forward. So many people are touched by cancer and they feel helpless," she said. But that sense of helplessness fades when volunteers work yarn into much-needed caps, said Smith Bayreuther.

As for her own involvement in the effort, the 48-year-old mother of two said business people should be charitable.

"It's a philosophical belief. A person in business should give back to the community," said Smith-Bayreuther. Maranacook Yarns also sells yarns and patterns and offers knitting classes.

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