

Dave, here is the article you requested on bud that ran in the Melrose Beacon July 18, 2011.

New Munich-There are a number of ways to make people smile.

Bud Smith did it with a bear.

From 1985 to 2009 he made about 20,000 stuffed bears that were given to children and occasionally adults during emergency situations.

“They (the bears) still do (bring smiles),” Thomas Travaglio of Gold Cross Ambulance Service told Smith Monday, July 11. “We are still using some of the bears you made.”

Travaglio and Jeff Kalla, also of Gold Cross Ambulance Service, and Glen Lyden, Gold Cross Public Affairs, came to New Munich last Monday to present Smith with an outstanding citizen award for creating the bears. Smith, who now lives at Das Goldene Wohnheim assisted living facility in New Munich, started making the stuffed toys shortly after he retired and moved to Melrose.

“I started in 1985,” he said. “My wife Teresa was making bags (carrying pouches) for wheelchairs. I saw the bears, and said ‘that would be interesting.’ They gave me a pattern and it took off.”

He and Teresa worked on projects together for a few years. Teresa made the wheelchair bags until her death in 1987.

“That was when I really started making 900 to 1,000 bears a year,” he said.

Almost every day, for the better part of two decades, Smith made bears. He knew they were going to help some child, in the midst of a stressful and often tragic situation. Usually they are given at an accident scene but not always.

“When a house burns, sometimes this is the only toy a kid has,” said Smith.

When Gold Cross members went to help victims of Hurricane Katrina, the bears went along. Smith also has photographs of the bears he made being held by children in Kenya.

“They are not only given to patients but to family members,” said Travaglio, who has more than once given the bears out. “At an accident, we give them to the children of the victims.”

Smith is 90 years old and has lymphedema and Parkinson’s disease. He is no longer able to sew the bears, but when he did, he had a system. He purchased material, buttons, stuffing and thread; cut the patterns and sewed them.

“When we first started, there was a factory in Coon Rapids called Stearns Manufacturing. They threw away their extra stuffing. I would go down there and get truckloads,” said Smith, adding, “I had my upstairs stuffed with stuffing.”

He figures he spent about \$700 a year making the bears. From his Melrose house came white, spotted, brown, long and shorthaired bears that were given to the Telephone Pioneers of America, a 100-year-old community service organization; the world's largest group of industry-specific employees and retirees dedicated to community service. Pioneers volunteer more than 15 million hours annually responding to the individual needs of their communities. The TPA promotes the creation of the bears. Smith is a member of the TPA.

The bears were in different colors and had a different feel, but each was hand sewn and almost all had a unique feature.

“I embroidered a mouth,” said Smith. “I got that idea from a panda bear.”

The bears with a smile soon became a familiar part of the Murphy Ambulance Service and later Gold Cross ambulance service, the service the TPA delivered the bears to, after Smith delivered the bears to TPA.

“Marlin Beaudine (of TPA) would say, ‘Well thanks, Bud but we need about 100 more,’” said Smith.

Lyden said the remark was not out of line. He is hoping someone will pick up where Smith left off. Elaine Garding, owner of Das Goldene Wohnheim, asked Smith if he could teach her to make the bears.

Smith said TPA members still make bears, but he has been told his bears are used as a standard of excellence.

“They say they are not as good as mine,” said Smith

“The love’s not there,” said Garding.

She said the bears can be an icebreaker.

“When he moved here, he brought one for each resident,” she said.

Smith had them at home. He said he had not made a final delivery of his bears before moving to New Munich. There were 150 bears in his car.

He saw some of the bears again when he was honored by Gold Cross, with a certificate and blanket, with the statement “Bud Smith, in appreciation for the comfort you have provided to many of our patients.” The certificate was presented “In special appreciation for comfort you have provided many of our patients. Your generous creation and contribution of more than 20,000 stuffed animals has helped many in challenging times.”

The bears are among the items on the checklist for stocking the Gold Cross Ambulances.

“Our paramedics carry lots of medication and a lot of things to help bring comfort to patients,” said Lyden. “But something like this (the bears), is a gesture of something soft and warm to make them (patients) feel good.”

In a Gold Cross ambulance, brought to New Munich, Kalla, Travaglio and Amanda Cherne, showed Smith where the bears are kept. He declined the offer to get into the ambulance, but recalled he was once transported to a hospital in a Gold Cross ambulance. He was released from the hospital a short time later, but he did recall not getting a bear.

Because of his illnesses, he can no longer make bears, something he says is frustrating, but he also knows his bears still are helping bring a bit of comfort and joy to children.

“A colleague of mine said she remembered him coming in with the bears,” said Lyden. “She said she called him ‘the man with a bag of smiles.’”