

# Crafting a way to help others

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**FORT RECOVERY** — Jackie Bergman carefully winds baby soft yarn around her crochet hook.

A touch of black mingles with the yellow yarn and soon the pattern taking shape is recognizable: a smiley face.

"I can do these, but I just can't figure out how to make the angels," she says with a laugh.

Bergman of Fort Recovery is one of about 550 crocheters across the United States who donate their time and supplies for Angels for Hope. Their busy hands create angels, butterflies and smiley faces upon request and they mail them free of charge to people in need of a little cheer or something to brighten their day.

Bergman, 58, read about the nonprofit organization in a Dear Abby column a few years ago and later in a women's magazine. Eventually she went online at [www.angelsforhope.org](http://www.angelsforhope.org) and decided it was something she could do in her spare time to help others.

"It's really fun and the butterflies are really simple to make," she says, adding she's crocheted about 150 of them so far.

Health problems have left her unable to work outside the home. A former factory worker, she now is on oxygen 24 hours a day. At one point, she took a temporary leave from crocheting due

to arm and wrist problems, but has rejoined the nearly 40 other Angels for Hope volunteers in Ohio.

Organization President Cindy Gabner of Palmyra, Pa., took over operations in January 2005. Her father and stepmother, Bill and Linda Rogers, live in Celina.

Angels for Hope began several years ago with about 15 Pennsylvania women who sent out crocheted angels to people experiencing sadness, a loss or a troubling time in their life. Later, following health problems of the previous leader, Gabner took over.

"I'm just amazed how many people know about us," she says. "We've had requests from as far away as the Philippines."

Gabner says many people stumble across the Web site, know someone who could use an act of kindness and fill out a request form. Applicants can request which of the three items they want sent, their color of choice (except smiley faces, which must be yellow) and decide whether they want their name included when the package arrives at the recipients' address.

The organization began a Fallen Soldier program after the United States went to war in Iraq and continues to send the handmade items to surviving families in memory of their loved one. Angels for Hope also implemented a 100th Birthday Butterfly Club in honor of anyone turning 100.

Gabner says the project is a lot of work for those taking requests and the gracious volunteers whose busy hands are the heart of the program. She says there are times she wonders if it's all worth it.

"But then you get that note or that e-mail from someone telling you how much that 6-inch, round smiley face meant to their mother when they pinned it to her pillow in the nursing home," she says. "And you almost feel like crying."

Some families pass the items on like heirlooms, she says, like a "little piece of themselves" kept in memory. She personally knows of a Celina man whose family placed the angel in his coffin when he passed away.

Bergman of Fort Recovery says sometimes a magnet or string is requested so the recipient can place it on a refrigerator or hang it in a room. She chooses to pay for all of the supplies herself, even though donations given to the organization help defray costs for some crocheters with tight budgets.

Although she's not spoken directly to any of her recipients (the organization doesn't encourage it unless it's requested), she knows many of her butterflyflies were given to children with cancer and adults recovering



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from surgery.

"One time I was requested to make them for five teens killed in a car wreck in northern Ohio. I was told to send them to their school where they were placed in a hallway by their pictures," she explains.

While she watches TV or sits in a doctor's office lobby, her hands stay busy and her

thoughts wonder about the person who will open her sealed envelope one day.

"I guess I'm hoping that when they get it, it cheers them up and puts a smile on their face, even if it's just for a little while," she says. "A child might not be able to hold a real butterfly but a colorful crocheted one can be touched and held for a long time."



Shelley Grieshop/The Daily Standard

**Jackie Bergman of Fort Recovery crochets a smiley face and will send the gift on to someone who has lost a loved one or is in need of good cheer. Bergman volunteers her time crocheting along with hundreds of other members of Angels for Hope.**