

Stuffed bears a lasting memory

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A stuffed bear clothed in memory of Robert Metevia features a cigarette burn where his pants pocket once was.

Metevia used that pocket to put out his cigarettes because he was not supposed to smoke. The Birch Run resident died two years ago after a long battle with lung cancer.

Saginaw Township resident Katie L. Losee, who makes memory bears as a volunteer for SouthernCare Saginaw, 6272 State in Saginaw Township, saw the burn as an opportunity to represent Metevia's life.

"I thought I'd make it a part of his bear," she said. "Everything is there — his shirt, his pants — but it's downsized to fit the bear."

The result was Losee's first memory bear of about 20 she has made thus far. Jeanne A. Butzin, Metevia's daughter and volunteer services coordinator at SouthernCare, said she melted when she saw it.

"It's a lasting treasure," she said. "Mom just loves the bear so much."

Memory bears, usual-



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Katie L. Losee, 51, left, of Quality Alterations and Embroidery in Saginaw Township and Jeanne A. Butzin, 56, SouthernCare Saginaw volunteer services coordinator in Saginaw Township, hold "memory bears" Losee made in honor of lost loved ones.

ly clad in clothing of a lost loved one, give emotional support to those who are grieving. Losee, 51, had not thought about making them until a few years ago when Butzin was a customer of her home-based business, Quality Alterations and Embroidery.

The two hit it off, Losee said.

"(Butzin) came to me with the idea of making memory bears and pillows," she said. "She is so observant of talents and how she can use them to help SouthernCare."

Butzin typically provides

Losee with a bear a family member selects, an outfit the person wore and information on the loved one's personality.

Losee then will replicate that personality using fabric and a sewing needle, a process that takes about two hours to complete.

"As I sew these, I have a feeling of how special that person was," Losee said. "I find myself thinking about them and their family and praying for them."

One bear Losee made was for a young man who had lost his mother. Her death

was especially tough on him because he found out he was adopted not long before she died, Losee said.

She chose to embroider "Mom by Choice" on the bear's pocket, which touched him.

"The message was clear to him," Losee said.

"For some, the bear might sit on a shelf or on a person's rocking chair. It's there for them to focus their emotions on it. It helps them heal."

Losee also makes memory pillows. One pillow she made featured fabrics from children whose mother died.

SouthernCare provides other similar volunteer services to patients and those in need. One such service is a "Last Wish" for patients who are terminally ill, ranging from going fishing to having nails done one last time.

Butzin uses the hidden talents of her volunteers to make SouthernCare's services unique, Losee said.

"All these special programs came into effect because of her," she said. "It's amazing what she does and how she finds hidden skills and talents to help those in need." ♦