

Valley Girls improve lives

Judy Hoyle
IVN Contributing Writer

The indomitable Valley Girls have completed another successful year of quilt-making and fundraising for the youth of the Illinois Valley.

In a presentation on Nov. 27, three non-profit organizations dedicated to improving the lives of Illinois Valley youth were each awarded \$2,000.

Representatives from I.V. Boys and Girls Club, the Evergreen Elementary School Life Skills program and I.V. High School baseball team received checks for their respective programs.

The funds were raised from raffling the 2017 Opportunity Quilt throughout the year, as well as silent auction sales and admission fees for the Valley Girls' ninth annual quilt show in October.

The presentation took place during a regularly scheduled Valley Girls meeting at the I.V. Senior Center. Valley Girls co-founder Carol Dickson said, "It's amazing that a nonprofit not affiliated with a national organization has stood the test of time. I thank the community and the small core of ladies who make this all possible. It says something, too, that when people hear that proceeds go to benefit kids in the Valley, they're very supportive and often donate more toward the cause."

The show features all new quilts each year, games and door prizes and a "country store" offering quilt kits, magazines, materials and donated quilts.

About 600 people attended this year's quilt show, the second highest attendance after the 2015 show.

Bad weather reduced attendance in 2016. Over the past nine years, the group has raised close to \$40,000.

"The ladies work really hard all year long putting quilts together. They use their own materials, design and time and then to raffle it off for local youth organizations - goes to show the magnitude of their hearts for our kids and the community. These ladies don't get enough recognition for what they do. As for the money donated to I.V. Boys & Girls Club, I am always floored by the amount each year. It's like receiving an early Christmas gift! The donation will go towards buying craft supplies and items for programs run during Club time," said Jenna Larkin, director of the I.V. Boys and Girls Club.

"We couldn't do this without the support of the community, Dickson said. "I personally think raising \$6,000 is pretty phenomenal. So many people have said this is more like an art show than a quilt show."

Work has already begun on the opportunity quilt for 2018, the design of which will include flowers and a representation of the months of the year.

According to Verla Beck, Valley Girls show coordinator, "Requirements for the new grants will be announced at the first of the year." The group will accept grant requests in February for next year's awards.

Once selected, rules include the requirement that members of each youth-focused nonprofit group assist with setting up and dismantling the show. Beck said that Jessie Dugas and his baseball team even helped pass out advertisements about the quilt show to community businesses this year.

Dickson said, "It's just nice to shine a positive spotlight on the Valley. The recipients were all appreciative of the funds, and we were very appreciative of their help with the set up and take down for the show."

Considering the October show included 100 quilts, it's surprising there are only 12 to 14 active Valley Girls members.

"Any Valley resident can submit a quilt for the show, Dickson explained. "We put a notice in the paper in September announcing the application period and process. Men are welcome, too. Randy Kent won a starter basket at a previous show, and he entered that quilt in the 2017 show."

The group meets the second and fourth Mondays of the month from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the I.V. Senior Center.

"Anyone interested is welcome to be a member of the Valley Girls," Dickson said. "You just need to join the Senior Center. We share techniques and help each other. Anyone interested in learning to quilt or improving their skills is welcome."

Group members also make comfort quilts. These are lap quilts for fire victims or anyone going through an emergency situation.

"It's just a gesture of kindness when the need arises," Dickson explained.

The Valley Girls have also made quilts for the Oregon Caves Chateau, with the goal of providing a quilt for every bed.

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