

HELPING HANDS

Mask production

Local tailor churns out facemasks for
Connecticut Hospice, businesses, individuals

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By Lisa Reisman

BRANFORD — Since mid-March, Branford tailor Lucy Camarda has been pulling 18-hour days at her sewing machine, making facemasks for a host of businesses, organizations and individuals.

Most recently, Connecticut Hospice, which last week announced that it would be taking non-COVID-19 patients displaced from overcrowded New Haven area hospitals, has

been working with Camarda to produce masks for its direct care staff.

In accordance with specifications from Dr. Joseph Sacco, MD, chief medical officer at CT Hospice, she's making the masks with two layers of muslin, adding an insert for an air filter, and cinching the material with a wire over the nose bridge to assure a snug fit.

She's also using shoelaces instead of elastic because "you're actually able to get a snugger and more comfort-

able fit and a better seal than the elastic band ear loops that might cut into your ears," Sacco said.

"This comes under the heading of better than nothing," Sacco said, adding the caveat that he emailed to his staff: "I can't guarantee the safety of this, I can't guarantee the efficacy of this, but I do have it on good authority that this can be helpful and it's most likely to be safe."

Camarda's homemade masks are not intended to

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Lucy Camarda, owner of Lucy Tailors in Branford, fits a prototype protective face mask that she handcrafted on her granddaughter Michelle Lugo, 13, of New Haven, on March 19 in Branford. Camarda has bought rolls of cotton muslin fabric and other components for least 1000 of her face masks that she will make available for free.

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afford the protection of a N95 rated mask from the coronavirus, which are reserved for "people who are already sick, as well as for the health workers and caregivers who must interact with infected individuals on a regular basis," according to the New York Times.

The CDC says medical professionals may use homemade face masks for care of patients with COVID-19 only "in setting where facemasks are not available [and] as a last resort."

Because it's not known to what extent homemade facemasks protect those on the front lines, "caution should be exercised when considering this option," according to the CDC.

In addition to CT Hospice, Camarda has provided 100 facemasks to the West Haven VA Hospital, 50 to the Branford Fire Dept, 40 to the Branford Police Dept, and 50 to AMR ambulance service in New Haven.

She's also produced and donated 40 masks to P&M Deli in Branford, 10 to Anthony's Ocean View in New Haven, as well as to countless individuals. Over the weekend, she filled an order for 85 masks for Whispering Pines Rehabilitation and Nursing Center in East Haven.

Providing masks for those not on the front lines is consistent with a recent change in thinking. As the New York Times reported last weekend, "experts have started to question official guidance about whether ordinary, healthy people should protect themselves with a regular surgical mask, or even a scarf."

While "wearing a mask may not necessarily prevent healthy people from getting sick, and it certainly doesn't replace important measures such as hand-washing or social distancing, it may be better than nothing," Dr. Robert Atmar, an infectious disease specialist at Baylor College of Medicine, told the Times.

Wearing a mask might reduce the likelihood that people will touch their face, another mode of transmission of the virus, according to Dr. David Price, an ICU doctor at Weill Cornell Medical Center. It might stop droplets from a sneeze or a cough from escaping. If nothing else, it serves as a visual reminder for social distancing.

In recognition of the different levels of protection needed, Camarda's



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Lucy Camarda, owner of Lucy Tailors in Branford, begins to make approximately 1000 handcrafted protective face masks on March 19 from rolls of cotton muslin fabric and other components that will be available for free to anyone who wants one.

masks for ordinary, healthy people are two-ply but have no insert.

She has no plans of stopping anytime soon.

"This community has made my family and me feel welcome in the 10 years since I opened my tailor shop," she said, adding that she's heartened by so many of the area's tailors and seamstresses pitching in.

"I want to pay it back. I'm going to keep making these masks until everyone who needs one has one or I run out

of materials or my hands fall off."

To pick up a mask, go to Lucy's Tailor, 504 Main Street, Branford. Masks will be left in Ziploc bags in a basket outside the front door. One per person please.

To support Lucy's efforts, donate sheets of muslin from Walmart or Ocean State Job Lot or wherever muslin is sold. To volunteer to cut material and thread, call 203-315-6666. Masks will be provided and all volunteers will be spaced at least six feet apart.