

ANOTHER KIND OF 'PURPLE HEART'



ARNOLD GOLD-NEW HAVEN REGISTER

Mary Ann Lotto (left) gives Bill Brody of Branford a kiss as he is presented with a quilt made by Lotto during a Quilts of Valor ceremony at the Willoughby Wallace Memorial Library in Branford on Aug. 23. Brody served in the Army Corp of Engineers during World War II. Lotto is part of the Willoughby Wallace Library Quilters. At right is Jane Dougherty, Connecticut coordinator for the Quilts of Valor Foundation.

WWII, Korean, Vietnam 'warriors' awarded with Quilts of Valor in Stony Creek

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BRANFORD » As army veteran Bill Brody, newly wrapped in a hand-made quilt, stood in front of a crowded room in Stony Creek's Willoughby Wallace Me-

morial Library, his face crumpled. His eyes filled with tears.

"Hang in there, Sarge," said Tony Pagnataro of Branford, 91, when Brody, 95, clad in his original Eisenhower jacket, returned to his seat in a touching, and at times lighthearted, Quilts of

Valor ceremony last Tuesday.

Brody, who served in the Army Corps of Engineers in England and France during World War II, and Pagnataro, a member of the Sixth Marine Division Strike Force on the island of Okinawa, were among

the seven veterans honored with quilts made by the Willoughby Wallace Library quilters.

It was all part of the Quilts of Valor initiative, founded in 2003 by a mother who found solace in her sewing machine when her

Quilts

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son was deployed to Iraq. Its mission: "to cover service members and veterans touched by war," as its website reads.

Since its founding, "we've had the honor and pleasure of wrapping 140,000 warriors," said Jane Dougherty, Connecticut coordinator of the Quilts of Valor Foundation, who presided over the ceremony.

That's no small feat. The organization holds itself to a standard of excellence that requires quilts of valor be made of such high quality that they are the civilian equivalent of a Purple Heart, according to its website. In keeping with that standard, "each quilt has gone through a lot of sets of hands and a lot of care," Dougherty said. Still, what sets apart quilts of valor is not just the



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Donna Robinson (left) gives Robert Laffin of Guilford a kiss as he is presented with a quilt made by Dru Dodd during a Quilts of Valor ceremony at the Willoughby Wallace Memorial Library in Branford on Aug. 23. Laffin served in the US Navy. Lotto is part of the Willoughby Wallace Library Quilters. At right is Jane Dougherty, Connecticut coordinator for the Quilts of Valor Foundation.

intricate stitching and stunning designs that consistently evoked a chorus of wows from the audience.

It's "the amount of love infused in each one of them," said Dougherty, adding that, no matter their sheer beauty, they're not meant to be stored in plas-

what the pattern is and where the fabric came from," as Dougherty put it, so did each veteran in accepting the ceremonial wrap.

Bill Farrell of Madison, 83, awarded three Purple Hearts while serving as a Marine in Korea, stood straight and tall. Branford's John Boboc, 94, an Army veteran who fought in the Battle of Normandy, beamed at his daughter, granddaughter and great grandson.

"For my family to be here is everything," he said later. Then there was East Haven's Charles Gallagher, 91, an Army veteran who served in the Pacific theater in World War II, looking awestruck at the exquisite pattern conceived by Annie Collier of Branford. And Richard Kikosicki, 73, stationed in Ger-

many with the Army during the Vietnam War. The Branford resident heeded

Dougherty's warning, after being wrapped in an Ann Marie Amman-made quilt, "to be careful, you're wearing a skirt, and you have not test-flown in skirts," with a broad grin.

In the end, given the air of camaraderie and pride among the veterans and, indeed, throughout the room, it didn't seem to matter in what era, or in what military branch, or in what capacity, anyone served.

No more so than when

Tony Pegnataro rose from his wheelchair to receive his quilt. Guilford's Robert Laffin, a Vietnam veteran who served in the Navy in the Gulf of Tonkin, sprang up to steady the chair. "Navy is always there for a Marine," he quipped, drawing laughter from the crowd.

If you know a veteran you'd like to honor, visit www.quilts.org, find the "take action" tab, and click "request a quilt."