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By GISEELLE ARREDONDO

• Leader & Times

Liberal's area military was awarded with unique Quilts of Valor Tuesday night at St. Andrew Episcopal Church under the direction of Kansas Southwest Coordinator for Quilts of Valor Peggy Luck.

"I'd like to welcome you all here tonight. I have never in my life been on this stage with this many handsome gentlemen at one time," Luck said.

"We are here tonight because we want to honor our area military, and it's our privilege to be with you who served our country and performed your duty and fought for the freedoms that we all experience today. We are very grateful to you and we thank you from the bottom of our hearts."

According to Luck, Quilts of Valor are officially in Southwest Kansas.

“Some of you may not be familiar with Quilts of Valor. It really hasn’t come out to our part of the state until now and obviously it’s here. Our Quilts of Valor Foundation mission statement is that all combat soldiers and veterans be covered with comforting and healing Quilts of Valor,” she said.

The quilts are a tangible “thank you,” Luck said.

“These quilts are a tangible reminder for these men that have served our country that have made sacrifices, and a tangible thank you to them,” she said.

Never underestimate the power of a woman with a sewing machine, Luck said.

“National service starts at home - I truly believe in that but not all of us can wear a uniform. But there is a way that we can help a soldier. The Quilt Guild believes that by making a quilt for a soldier or a veteran is one form of national service that we can do, so never underestimate the power of a woman with a sewing machine,” she said.

So what is a Quilt of Valor?

“A Quilt of Valor is not a charity quilt, and it’s not a blanket, and there is something magical and healing about the folds in the Quilt of Valor,” Luck said. “A Quilt of Valor consists of three layers, and our Guild likes to think of the three layers as this: the top of the quilt has lots of colors, lots of different shapes, and lots of different sizes of pieces of fabric. And these little fabrics, these little pieces, represent all the individuals that have come together to make these quilts for these gentlemen.”

Some of the quilts were made by one person but many others were made by several members of the Quilt Guild, Luck said.

“If you are a member of our Quilt Guild and you have helped, or even if you are not a member of

the quilt guild – I know there are some people here who are not members but have helped with Quilts of Valor – please raise your hand.”

Many hands lifted and the room burst into applause.

More than 50,000 stitches are used on a quilt.

“One of our machine quilters has a counter on her machine, and it counts how many stitches that machine is making to put the three layers together or quilt to quilt and the counter on just one of these quilts was over 50,000,” Luck said. “And that’s just the stitches that are holding it together, not the ones that sew together each piece.

“So that kind of tells you that all these stitches are the ones that you can see, the 50,000, but you know the other ones are there because you will feel the warmth of the quilt through these stitches,” she added.

The middle of the quilt represents the hope that the quilt will bring comfort and warmth, maybe peace, and maybe some healing, Luck said.

“The back of the quilt is a big piece of fabric and it contains everything. It holds the whole thing together and that is the strength of the quilt,” she continued. “It reminds us of the strength of each one of you soldiers. It also reminds us of the strength of the families. Families make quite a sacrifice for soldiers, and it also reminds us of the strength and support of the community and of our nation.

More than 91,566 Quilts of Valor have been presented as of October 2013, Luck said.

“148 quilts were presented just last week. Tonight it’s our pleasure to award several Quilts of Valor to the veterans in our community and you should know that each Quilt of Valor is presented with a protective case and also with a hug.

“A hug is the final contact that we have with your quilt, and so the hug comes from of the Needles and Friends Quilt Guild members and from the Quilts of Valor family,” she said.

One by one, each soldier was called to stand and accept his quilt. A bit of background information was also then presented to the public on the veterans as they were cloaked in their quilts.

Larry Johnson was drafted into the Army. He served in Vietnam from 1968 to 1969 as an E-4.

DeLari George was drafted into the Army and served in Vietnam for one long year, 1968 to 1969. Dalary was a ground pounder, which means that he walked everywhere he went. He was also a button hole digger, a soldier who digs holes so that others can keep safe by keeping their buttons close to the ground. Mr. George received two purple hearts for his service.

Sergeant Ronald Patrick served four years, four months and four days in the Marines 1941 to 1945. He went in six months before World War II started and the U.S. first bombed the Japanese. He was in what was called the forgotten battalion.

Captain Tom Shook served in the Army Air Force in World War II, 1943 to 1946. He flew B-24s and B-29s. Captain Shook was awarded five bronze stars among many other medals.

Larry Louderback enlisted in the United States Marine Corps for six years in August of 1965. He had boot camp at San Diego. He arrived at Vietnam June 10, 1966. He was an M60 machine gunner in an infantry squad. He was wounded Dec. 21, 1966, and was hospitalized from Dec. 21, 1966, to June 28, 1967. Mr. Louderback retired from the Marine Corps Oct. 1, 1970, with an honorable discharge.

“Mr. Louderback, we know freedom is not free, and we are appreciative to you for our freedom,” Luck added.

Sergeant James Howell comes from a family of U.S. service men. He has three uncles and a father who served before him. His father was an Army Airforce flight instructor in World War II. Howell had to have his father's signature in order to enlist. He enlisted in the Army right out of high school and he served as a motor sergeant in Germany, Korea and Vietnam, 1964 to 1972.

"Sergeant Howell is proud of the fact that he was able to serve his country," Luck said.

Derrell Long enlisted in 1962 and served until 1966 in the Marines. He also fought in Vietnam.

Aaron Epp went into the Army August 1965. He went to Vietnam in 1966. He was in the Army for 14 months, three days and five hours. He was in the service for not quite two years, and in Vietnam for five hours. He was trained as a radar radio repair technician but was made into a clerk. As a gunner, he flew on a helicopter to deliver the orders to the front line.

Warren Fox received his draft notice in 1965 while he was helping his dad with the wheat harvest. Two weeks later he was in the Army. On Dec. 20, 1965, after basic training at Fort. Leonard Wood, Mo. He was sent to Vietnam where he served as a combat engineer.

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