

Sewing To Serve

By Alissa Reinhard

Most new parents are overwhelmed with a jubilant mix of joy and uncertainty when welcoming a baby into the world. Their lives and hearts are forever changed. It's an exciting, yet trying time in mom and dad's lives, caring for a healthy baby. But imagine those parents whose babies came into this world months early or with chronic illnesses or other challenges. The emotions experienced by these new parents are heightened, to say the least. The San Antonio chapter of Threads of Love, a sewing ministry, meets the needs of these new families by providing tiny, premature infants with crochets, quilts, and knit clothing and accessories. These items are then packaged with a prayer for delivery to local hospitals and other preemie caregivers. But it's not just clothing that this ministry provides these very special families, it's a system of support, prayer, hope and faith.

Liz Page, founder and director of the San Antonio SARAH (Sewing and Reaching a Heart) chapter of Threads of Love, began the ministry in 1999 with eight volunteers. Today, Threads of Love (TOL) has hundreds of volunteers locally and distributed 51,815 items in 2016. Liz and her husband, Joe, were inspired to open the chapter after Liz delivered twins born six weeks early.

"We personally experienced the NICU (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit)," explained Liz. "Although that was over forty years ago, the emotions and anxieties are still the same. The two words that best describe the NICU experience are 'roller coaster,' since parents never know what the next minute holds for their preemie. It is an extremely emotional time."

More recently, the Pages have experienced the loss of seven grandchildren who did not survive premature birth.

"During such emotional times, you feel



Two Easter outfits crafted by Threads of Love volunteers.

sad for your family member whose dreams have been shattered and you feel the loss of opportunities to speak or play with this precious gift from God," said Liz. "But we will meet them in Heaven one day."

The 32 different items crafted and delivered by TOL encourage, comfort and promote neurological development and are gratefully accepted by NICU nurses.

"The nurses remark repeatedly about what love the parents feel from the TOL items and how it makes their jobs easier," explained Liz. "The items we deliver let the parents know that they are not alone, but that someone cares. We are continually renewed and revitalized to do what we do by the very process of delivering the gifts made by the loving hands of so many caring volunteers who will never have the opportunity to meet those whom the items are for."

For the babies who do not survive, TOL provides memory boxes and burial outfits to honor and respect these precious and blessed babies. TOL's goal is to meet the needs of every premature baby—both living and deceased—in local hospitals, hospitals in the surrounding area, overseas in military hospitals, and anywhere else as requested. Over the years, 20 satellites have developed



Threads of Love volunteers Anne Lo (left) and Indriata Tedja, both from Indonesia, handcraft items for delivery to local hospitals. The blankets, outfits and other items benefit babies born prematurely.

from the SARAH Chapter.

TOL has touched many lives, including Laura Caddell's. In 2009, Laura and her husband lost their daughter Faith Marie at nearly 23 weeks. Laura received a Memory Box and other mementos from TOL to remember her little girl by.

"There was a little pink bear with angel wings," said Laura. "As I lifted it out of the box, I felt in my heart that, one day, I would have another baby girl and that I would give that bear to her," said Laura. "It was tangible hope to hold on to in one of my darkest hours."

After a little bit of research Laura discovered TOL and was so inspired by the Pages that she knew she wanted to partner with them in some way. She founded Project Hope in 2012, a non-profit that collects items for memory boxes as well as the supplies to create and decorate them.

"Because of the hope and love that was shown to me through TOL, I am now blessed to be a part of sharing hope and love with other women like myself," said Laura.

TOL is run entirely by volunteers who are always needed and welcome. Donated items desired include baby fabric (100% cotton with no polyester) and baby yarn (3-ply, mixed colors, nothing added to the yarn); bright, colorful material including flannel; batting for quilts; and monetary



Threads of Love San Antonio Chapter founder Liz Page (left) and Linda Coward, satellite leader from Community Bible Church, display isolette covers made to encourage neurological development in premature babies.

contributions used to supplement the needs of a growing ministry and replace an aging delivery van.

"People are always surprised that there are no salaries," explained Liz. "We never charge for anything and we never have fundraisers. We deliver to the hospitals every two weeks and ship a 'Love Gift' with essential items or 'Remembrance Bags' to help parents walk through their grief—any time or any where—when requested."

TOL makes sure that parents of hospitalized preemies feel more "normal" by providing clothing that fits their babies and other items that encourage mom and dad to participate in their baby's care. For families of babies who have passed away, TOL brings some comfort through providing beautiful burial outfits sized perfectly for the little one and other items without mom and dad having to search or think about such things during a very difficult time.

For more information about Threads of Love or to learn more about how you can make a difference in someone's life, visit www.threadsoflove.org or email tolsatx@gmail.com. You can also visit their workshop located at 19595 IH-10 West between 9 a.m.-4 p.m. on Tuesdays or Thursdays.