

'A BLESSING TO BE ABLE TO GIVE BACK'

96-year-old Gene Jernigan sews masks to assist in the fight against the spread of COVID-19.

By Jim Herrin

She's not directly on the front lines, but Gene Jernigan is still determined to do her part to help fight the pandemic in Putnam County.



From her COVID-restricted quarters at the Cedar Hills Senior Living Community, the 96-year-old has been hard at work, sewing protective masks to be distributed through the efforts of the CookevilleStrong-Operation Stay Healthy Facebook group.

"Each day, except Sunday, I spend about three and a half hours at the sewing machine," Jernigan said. "I work from a pattern they are cut from, and then I put them together."

She has sewn more than 100 masks so far.

"I sew a set at a time, but to make one by itself takes about 20 minutes," she said. "I am keeping myself busy by making masks and writing letters."

Sewing has been a lifelong avocation for her.

"I learned when I was 10 years old," she said. "My grandmother taught me hand sewing."

She got the idea to start sewing masks from her daughter, Carra McNelly, who said the Facebook group is providing the supplies.

"The goal of Cookeville Strong Operation Stay Healthy is to supply as many face masks to those who need them," the group posted. "Nursing homes, home health care, senior group, food pantries, doctors offices, hospitals and more in Cookeville and surrounding areas."

Their Facebook page notes that the group "is completely non profit and all donations go into making masks."

"It is super easy. You sew masks then the masks get picked up and taken to a facility in our area that is in desperate need of masks," the post said. "They may also be donated to individual nurses, public service workers and high risk patients. If you are needing supplies feel free to ask, we will probably have what you need."

Jernigan sees the daily sewing as a blessing, not a chore.

"We have been blessed all our lives with wonderful caring people, and it is a blessing to be able to give back," she said.

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