

Mount Carmel senior brings comfort to cancer patients



By George P. Matysek Jr.

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ESSEX – When Janine Tolley was undergoing chemotherapy at University of Maryland St. Joseph Medical Center in Towson, someone gave her a homemade blanket to keep her warm during the cancer treatments.

Comforted and encouraged by the gesture, Tolley took the blanket with her in all her treatments. After later transferring to Mercy Medical Center in Baltimore, Tolley vowed to start a program there to make blankets for other cancer patients.

Although Tolley's cancer took the 51-year-old before she could get the program off the ground, family and friends took up her cause.

Kimberly Single, a 17-year-old graduating senior at Our Lady of Mount Carmel High School in Essex who served as valedictorian at her school's May 30 commencement, is among those spearheading an effort that has become known as "Blankets for Warriors."

Single, whose older brother is marrying Tolley's daughter this month, helps coordinate monthly sewing sessions with a group of 20 volunteers from her school and Our Lady of Mount Carmel's middle school. They craft colorful fleece material into approximately four warm blankets every session that are then donated to Mercy. Outside volunteers make additional blankets at other locations.

Single was inspired by Tolley's outlook on life.

"I've never seen anyone more positive than she was," said Single, a member of Mount Carmel's cheerleading squad, president of the school's National Honor Society and manager of the lacrosse team.

"I remember how much she enjoyed that blanket," she said. "The family still keeps it because it meant so much to her. If our blankets can help other families, then I'm willing to make a million of them."

The school has held fundraisers for Blankets for Warriors, Single said, including "no-shave November," when male students were permitted to break the school's policy against facial hair in exchange for a donation to the cause.

Connie Flagg, a Mount Carmel teacher and co-moderator of the school's Blankets for Warriors group, described Single as a "quiet leader" in social ministry who is dedicated to whatever project she starts.

"She sees what her duty is and she does it," Flagg said. "She doesn't really expect anyone to say thank you. She does it because it's the right thing to do."

Single serves as a student ambassador, meeting with prospective students interested in Mount Carmel. An honors student dually enrolled at the Community College of Baltimore County, Single also tutored a third grader at Mount Carmel's elementary school this academic year. Her Catholic faith has become an increasingly important guiding force in her life, Single said.

"I've decided now that I absolutely want to be a practicing, faithful Catholic throughout my life," said Single, who will be confirmed in October at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church. "I like our Catholic traditions, and I think it helps me get closer to God."

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