

## Girl stitches bears for sick kids

● Buy a handmade bear from “Share-A-Bear,” and another is given to a child at the Arnold Palmer Hospital for Children.

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For Nina Manuel, “Thanksgiving stuffing” has a much more literal translation than the traditional side-dish served during holidays.

After her family festivities today, the 15-year-old of Rome plans to stuff and put the finishing touches on several homemade bears she makes as part of her nonprofit Share-A-Bear project, which gives stuffed animals to a children’s hospital.

“We’ve got a lot to do by Friday,” Nina said on Wednesday, while looking over the mounds of colorful fabric in the living room of her family’s Garden



Paul Halfacre / Rome News-Tribune

Nina Manuel (left) and Kim Manuel cut fabric Wednesday at their home for a teddy bear to be donated to the Arnold Palmer Hospital for Children in Orlando, Fla.

Lakes home. “We have a lot of special orders to do, and we’re gearing up for Small Town Christmas in the Country in Cave Spring the weekend of Dec. 7.”

The idea for Share-A-Bear first came to Nina when she was admiring a pair of shoes in her history class in April.

“I was looking at my Toms and I knew when you buy a

pair he donates a pair, and I liked that concept,” said the sophomore at Unity Christian School. “And I’ve always loved teddy bears.”

Nina said she started collecting teddy bears at a young age and her mom would bring them back from her travels.

“I’ve got one from every state my mom has traveled to,” she said. “I’ve probably

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Read this story online for a link to the Share-A-Bear website.

got over 100 bears that I’ve collected throughout years.”

Nina first came up with a plan to buy small teddy bears from the Dollar Tree, and she started selling salsa at her school to raise money to purchase them.

“But those bears weren’t hypoallergenic, with the fur, and they have the button eyes,” said Nina’s mother, Kim Manuel. “So, Nina came to me and asked if we could try to make the bears, and I said, ‘Well, we can try.’”

The two then picked out a pattern from the craft store and fired up the sewing machine for the first time.

“I had never sewed before that,” laughed Kim Manuel. “Her grandmother was the seamstress and I had to go to her to show us how to sew the bear shut.”

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## BEARS from 1A

The bear-making process has since become a family affair. Nina said she works alongside her parents, Kim and Chris Manuel, creating the bears from cotton and fleece fabrics with different designs and patterns such as collegiate, camouflage, and polka dots.

“Dad cuts the fabrics, moms sews them up and I stuff,” she added.

With Share-A-Bear, Nina sells the bears at craft fairs, on Etsy.com and by custom orders sent to her email Jerisjarsbynina@gmail.com.

For every bear sold, starting at \$30, she uses two-thirds of the proceeds to pay for the materials as well as to make and donate one to the youngsters at Arnold Palmer’s Hospital for Children in Orlando, Fla., where her brother Alan Brock is a pediatric cardiologist.

The last \$10 goes into a donation fund, said Nina, and has been used to raise money for the Red Cross, Relay-for-Life, the American Autism foundation and other charities. So far, the bears have



Paul Halfacre / RN-T

Completed teddy bears wait to be donated.

raised over \$1,800 dollars to donate to local causes.

“We made 20 bears and donated them back in September to the families of firefighters who lost their lives and the surviving firefighter in the Arizona fires,” Kim Manuel added.

Nina said she and her mom were able to make their first bear-drop at Arnold Palmer’s during her school’s fall break and delivered 80 bears to the hospital. They hope to make another drop before Christmas.

“If we don’t get the chance to go for Christmas, we’ll definitely be sending a few back with Alan when he comes to visit for the holidays,” said Kim Manuel.