

Arlington residents combat face mask shortages one stitch at a time

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Byline: Cecilia Lenzen

Body

The increased demand for personal protective equipment because of the COVID-19 outbreak has led to shortages across the country.

On Monday, President Donald Trump announced an executive order prohibiting the hoarding of masks, hand sanitizers and other medical equipment for either personal or business use. The Federal Emergency Management Agency will distribute 8 million N95 respirator masks and 13.3 million surgical masks across the country to areas with the greatest need.

Arlington resident Tricia Alford is doing what she can to help at a local level. After reading about face mask shortages, she began researching online how to sew face masks at home, trying various patterns to see which would work best for local needs.

Life + Entertainment

With Mass canceled or restricted, the UTA Catholic community turns to video chat, private prayer

- By Cecilia Lenzen, The Shorthorn staff

Usually she sews quilts, but now that there isn't much of a demand for homemade quilts, Alford said she's using her supplies of cotton fabric for the face masks instead. It takes her about 20 minutes to make one face mask, and so far, she's sewn several dozen.

After reading about face mask shortages, Tricia Alford began researching how to sew face masks at home, trying out various patterns.

Courtesy: Tricia Alford

"I knew they wouldn't be medical grade, I knew they wouldn't be as protective as the real masks that they should have," she said. "But it's better than nothing if they have nothing."

She posted in a Facebook group about her new project to see if any locals were interested in using her homemade masks and said she was overwhelmed with the response.

Now, she donates the masks to anyone who asks for them. When people reach out to get some, Alford said she seals the masks in a Ziploc bag, labels them with the recipient's name and leaves them on her doorstep to be collected.

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Arlington resident Patty Chen is working in a similar way. As part of the DFW Chinese American Epidemic Relief organization, she sews face masks for the group to donate to Texas hospitals and communities.

Chen began over a month ago, and has helped create hundreds so far. She said she taught herself how to sew for this project and recently stocked up on fabric from Joann's before nonessential stores closed.

She said the organization donates masks to individuals but focuses on hospitals because of their greater need for medical supplies during the pandemic. Right now, the virus is more urgent than many people originally thought, she said, and she wants to help the community however she can.

Patty Chen said she taught herself how to create face masks and recently stocked up on fabric.

Courtesy: Patty Chen

Many hospitals have conflicting rules about accepting donations during this time. At the time of publication, local Arlington hospitals did not respond on whether they would accept homemade face mask donations.

Kelly Hanes, director of Community & Public Relations at Medical City Arlington, said he was unaware of Medical City Arlington officially accepting donations as a hospital. However, Alford said several nurses have reached out to her individually on Facebook to accept face mask donations for their own use.

Last week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommended homemade face masks as a "crisis response" option for health care workers, saying that makeshift masks like bandanas or scarves could be used in place of official surgical gear as a last resort.

Although homemade face masks are not proven to be the best option for preventing the spread of COVID-19, both Chen and Alford said they're glad they can do at least something to help.

Alford recently created a YouTube video tutorial to show others who are interested how to make their own face masks.

"It's something that I can do," Alford said. "I can't do a lot of other things, but that's something that I could do that could help."

@CecilLenzen

features-editor.shorthorn@uta.edu

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