

This story is part of the series
MAKE A DIFFERENCE DAY

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'Today' hosts help honor those who make a difference

Donna Freydkin, USA WEEKEND 12:16 p.m. EDT April 4, 2014

Matt Lauer, Savannah Guthrie 'shine a light' on service, Make a Difference Day

The Women of Quail Creek project was among the 10 best in the country earning a \$10K reward — the check is payable to the Homeless Veterans program at the VA!

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Award winner, Jessica Collins, 14, of Shelbyville, KY, launched a charitable effort to raise money to supply beds to kids who don't have one.

When Matt Lauer first threw around ideas for the *Today* show's year-long charitable Shine a Light campaign, he thought big.

"I wanted to clean up America. No, seriously. When I was growing up, there was this whole beautify America campaign. That made a huge impact on me," he says. "Just this Sunday, I was out picking up trash on the road I live on."

But cleaning up a nation takes more than one person. Or one show. Savannah Guthrie grounded his idea. "Let's do something we can accomplish in a year," the *Today* co-anchor says. "So we thought, 'What if we build a playground?' When you're a child, you need play. That's not a luxury item."

And so *Today* is creating a playscape in Newark, N.J.

On April 10, Lauer and Guthrie will be special guests at the annual Make A Difference Day Awards Luncheon in Washington, D.C. Sponsored by USA WEEKEND, Newman's Own and Points of Light, the event recognizes community service. Other honorees are Jon Bon Jovi (for his Soul Foundation) and the organizers of 14 projects that took place on Make A Difference Day, the nation's largest day of volunteering.

Their work is featured here:

- A Place to Sleep:** [Teen gets beds for kids](#)
- We Care Bears:** [Stuffed animals help at tough time](#)
- Knitting for vets:** [Arizona woman leads effort to make clothing for homeless veterans](#)
- Operation Access:** [Helping others see](#)
- University of Akron:** [College gives aid](#)
- Escambia Charter School:** [Florida teens give back](#)
- Loukoumi author:** [Books spur kids to action](#)
- Sandy relief walk:** [New Jersey student raises money for new homes after destruction](#)
- BrickDreams:** [Toys build hope](#)
- Playworks:** [Group fixes up D.C. center](#)
- Cleveland, Tenn.:** [Town pulls together](#)
- Fayetteville, Ark.:** [College stages big effort](#)
- Weirton, W.Va.:** [Volunteers rally to help less fortunate](#)
- Assistance League:** [Group wins All-Star Award](#)

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Make A Difference Day Awards: Knitting for the vets

Nancy Dunham, USA WEEKEND 12:20 p.m. EDT April 4, 2014

Arizona woman leads effort to make clothing for homeless veterans



(Photo: -)

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This article is part of a series on USA WEEKEND's Make A Difference Day Award winners.

The Women of Quail Creek project was among the 10 best in the country, earning a \$10k reward – check is payable to the Homeless Veterans program at the VA!

It all started with a 14-hour airplane ride in 2010 and a loom knitter.

Rather than grumble about the hours of travel she faced flying to Australia and New Zealand, Peggy McGee decided to put the time to good use. Although she's not a "knitter," she decided to use the loom to make hats for homeless veterans. When a woman she met at a local thrift shop donated 39 skeins of yarn to the project, McGee's idea really took shape.

Make A Difference Day Awards: 'Today' hosts help honor service efforts

"I knew there was no way I could ever use it all up and told some of the Women of Quail Creek members that if they would do the knitting I would provide the yarn," says McGee, 69, of the 55-and-older adult active community in Green Valley, Ariz. "And as they say, 'The rest is history!'"

The effort has grown into a clothing drive for homeless veterans, held on Make A Difference Day for the past three years.

"After we were told last year that our donations kept the homeless veteran population in the Tucson area clothed for two months, we were determined to do more this year given the number of veterans who had just recently returned from Iraq and Afghanistan," says McGee.

Mission accomplished. Besides handmade hats and other clothing items, community members donated bed and kitchen linens, business suits, vacuum cleaners, backpacks, trash cans and money. The 18 volunteers sorted about 3,000 items and delivered them to the Southern Arizona Veterans Health Care System.

"These donations help raise the recipients' self esteem and make they feel good that the community cares about them," says Jodi Frederick, clinical director of Rehabilitation Programs. "It gives them dignity and hope."