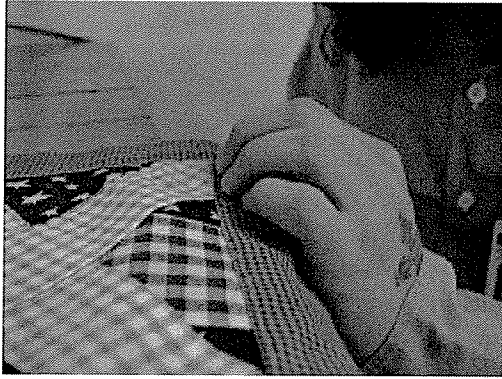


# Hard Core Quilters

By Boyd Huppert, KARE 11 News



To persuade a flat sheet of aluminum to take the shape of a license plate, prison officials in St. Cloud employ a determined 100 ton press, quite possibly the most effective convincer in corrections.

That was until Karol Bruggeman persuaded a high security penitentiary to start a quilting bee.

If your image of quilting involves church basements and grandmothers you'll understand what Bruggeman was up against. Karol had to convince

prison administrators that even inmates convicted of assaults and murders could be trusted to quilt.

You can't get scissors onto an airplane these days but Karol wanted to get them into a prison.

Bruggeman says, "there were people who said these tools should not be allowed in this setting."

Yet her 30 years of teaching inmates helped Bruggeman convince prison officials that some prisoners, especially young offenders, could not only be trusted to quilt, but would be man enough to want to.

"I just knew it would work, I just felt it would," she says, "I've just always thought, if you ask people in the right way and you lead in the right way, they would follow you."

And why not? In a place where quiet can be as scarce as filet mignon, quilting is food for the soul. "It's different in here," says inmate Dan Pena, "it's more peaceful. Everybody gets along."

Inmates also watch their language, that's because Bruggeman insists on it. "She doesn't like when we swear," says inmate Jeremy Wersal. "She's like a mom always telling us to quit." Karol says, "this could be a place where men could be tearing at each others throats, or they could be supportive and caring of each other."

Working just an hour a week - using donated material and worn out scraps of their own bed sheets and shirts - the inmates at St. Cloud State Prison have completed a dozen quilts the past four years. Every one of them was donated to a local shelter for battered women and their children. "I consider it a way to use their talents and skills to give back to society," says Bruggeman.

She's made a believer out of inmate Myon Burrell who says, "by coming down here, it's not just for me," he says. "It's for the kids you're doing the quilts for."

A century ago the inmates at St. Cloud built the prison walls with their own hands. St. Cloud State Prison has all the walls it needs, but can the land of 10,000 stories ever have too many quilts?

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