

Auxiliary Gives Young Patients at Mid Coast “Cool Teddy” Bears from Grampa’s Garden

First published in the *MCH Volunteer Pulse*, Fall, 2011.

The Teddy Bear Club at Mid Coast Hospital, a project of the Auxiliary, provides a stuffed animal to children who come to the hospital for a particular reason— a lab test, tubes in their ears or a serious problem that lands them in the Emergency Department. Frightened by these new surroundings, a new stuffed animal helps children calm down.

For several months now, children have been receiving a new Teddy, especially designed for Mid Coast Hospital, that is much more than a stuffed animal. Placed in the freezer for an hour or so, this Teddy becomes “The Cool Teddy” or “Teddy Pac” and may be used over and over again to “provide cuddly comfort for bumps, bruises and sore feelings,” according to its tag. The bear, with the Mid Coast logo, has been completely toy tested, and has no movable parts.



The designer, president, owner and manufacturer of this delightful “Cool Teddy” is Grampa’s Garden Inc. of Brunswick and Topsham, a business started 19 years ago by Jacqui Painchaud, a licensed physical therapist. Using her professional expertise, Jacqui dreamed up the idea of creating holistic therapy packs using natural materials, reflective of her upbringing by environmentally conscientious parents. Her company is named for them to honor their holistic health interests, which they passed onto their daughter.

Patty Ames, vice president and a part owner, said Jacqui “began to experiment with grains and other natural ingredients, starting small, making products in her home.” Her first products were three hot or cold packs, an herbal massage oil, and a beeswax lip balm. Nineteen years ago Jacqui went to her first Common Ground Fair and sold out the first day so she went home and made some more! She hasn’t stopped since.

Susan Hatch, head of the design team, works with Jacqui and Patty to develop new products like the Teddy as well as the new “Simply Cool” fabric product line, said Patty. “People love, love, love what we have done using all natural materials. Long grain rice and flax seed are the main ingredients, and if scented, we use spices and herbs. When it comes to aroma therapy, we err on the conservative side. The beauty of these products is that they can be both a cold pack and a hot pack, depending on the reason for use, and easily go from the freezer to microwave.”

Kara Aleixo Johnson, chair of the Mid Coast Auxiliary Teddy Bear Club, has used Grampa's Garden products "since I was expecting our kids. I bought the heat-able shawl to comfort the low back pain of pregnancy.

"Since then, all four of our children have received Teddy's from Santa and/or for other special occasions—like having tonsils removed. They have been such a comfort to my own kids, I was certain other children would love them as well."

Through a mutual friend Teresa Gillis, also on the Teddy bear committee, Kara was introduced to Patty, "after many meetings and negotiations on behalf of the hospital, we finally came up with a Grampa's Garden product—the "Cool Teddy"—that would be a comfort to the children who came to Mid Coast."

Parents will like the idea that no foreign products are used in the Teddy. According to Patty, "We have control over what's inside the Teddy's, and all of our products, by producing them locally."

A very interesting aspect of this business is the cottage industry that has sprung from its success, Patty said. "The people who make these products are men and women in the surrounding towns who sew in their homes, and adhere to a strict weekly schedule of picking up kits and returning with the finished product one week later." All stitchers work on high performance sewing machines. Mostly women, these stitchers could be grandmothers, single moms or moms wishing to work from home so children are not in daycare.

"This is peak season right now," Patty said, so stitchers are very busy filling orders for such companies as LL Bean, Orvis, Vermont Country Store, Lois' Naturals in Scarborough, Morning Glory in Brunswick, Royal River in Yarmouth and Whole Foods in Portland, and (yes) the Gift Shop at Mid Coast Hospital.

"The body shawl, 20 by 28 inches, is the #1 product for Grampa's Garden, and is one of the 10 top products for Orvis," Patty said.

"Our international market is a huge part of our business right now," Patty explained, "we have a bricks and mortar store in Dubai, from which an agent handles the Middle East, as well as orders going to Columbia, Korea, Canada and Great Britain. Our largest growing market in the past five years is sensory integrated weighted products for children and the elderly."

Grampa's Garden has a retail store on Park Drive, Topsham, next to Goodwill, Check out its website at www.grampasgarden.com.

Kara said she is "pleased to offer the Grampa's Garden Teddy. These locally made products fit perfectly with the caring and healing environment to which Mid Coast Hospital is committed."

If you would like to make a donation to the Auxiliary so that more children will receive a "Cool Teddy," please make checks payable to MCH Auxiliary, and mail to Mid Coast Hospital Auxiliary, 121 Medical Center Dr., Brunswick 04011, and note that the donation is for Teddy bears.

In addition to Teddy bears, the following businesses regularly donate new stuffed animals (must have tags on) for patients, all of which are gratefully received: Atlantic Regional Federal Credit Union, Key Bank, Bath Savings, Navy Federal Credit Union, Androscoggin Bank, Norton Insurance and Financial, and Downeast Energy.

The Teddy Bear Club was started over 15 years ago by an employee who collected bottles and cans for recycling. With the proceeds, she purchased bears and other stuffed animals for children who came to the hospital for care.