

SQUARE BY SQUARE

Quilting it forward

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Willoughby Wallace
Quilters keep on giving

By Lisa Reisman

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BRANFORD » It was just another Tuesday with the Willoughby Wallace Quilters in Stony Creek.

Except the rain was coming down outside the cheerfully lit conference room at the back of Willoughby Wallace Library as member after member of the Quilters slogged in. It was mak-

ing the roads slick, someone said, and the wet leaves weren't helping. But how about those UConn women? someone else was saying. How about that last minute? And is someone going to open the Kit Kats?

Under the lively conversation around the conference table, something deeper was at work, and it wasn't just the idea that each was quietly adding to the impressive range of the group's good works that have brought warmth and joy to countless recipients since its founding by six women in 1983.

It wasn't just, in other words, the backing that Branford's Annie Collier was sewing on a square of fabric for the Quilts of Valor program, an initiative to cover service members and military veterans with quilts of such high standard and sheer beauty that, according to its website, it's meant to be the civilian equivalent of a purple heart award.

"I get an extra kick out of presenting quilts to Vietnam vets," said the spirited Collier, who's been with the group since 1985,

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(Arnold Gold-New Haven Register) Dru Dodd (left) helps Annie Collier hold a Quilt of Valor up for the rest of the Willoughby Wallace Quilters to view at the Willoughby Wallace Library in the Stony Creek section of Branford.

Quilts

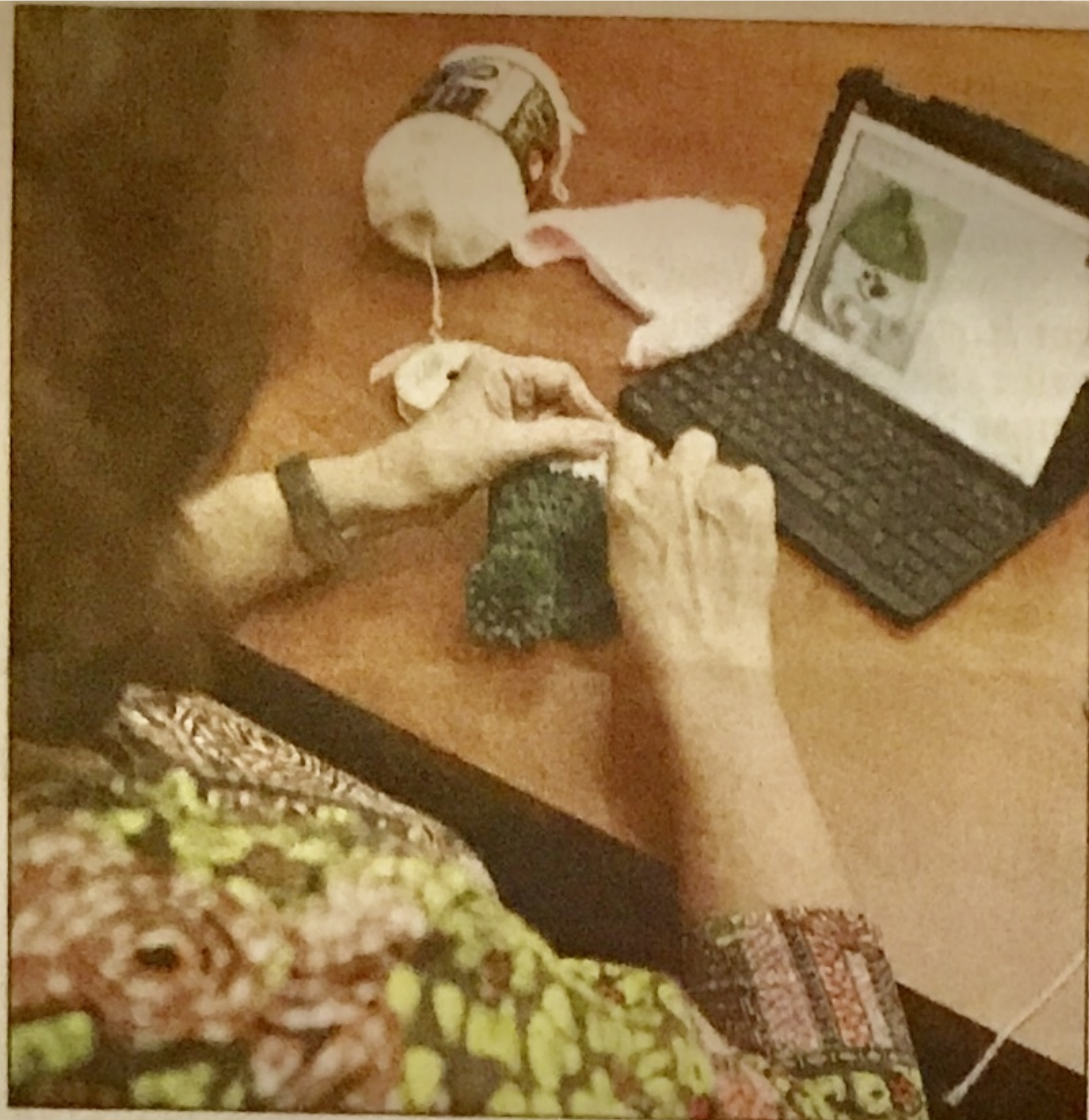
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as Maryanne Lotto of East Haven, member since 1996, nodded in agreement from across the conference table, needles clicking. "It's so important that they be recognized."

Nor was it just the quilts for Quilts Beyond Borders, an organization whose mission is to ensure children in refugee camps around the world stay warm, with bright colors to keep spirits and hopes high.

And that's not counting the dresses made out of pillowcases for children in orphanages throughout Central Africa. As Dru Dodd, a member of the Quilters since the early 1990s, explained, "we make the dresses long enough so they start out down by the ankles and they can wear them for a longer period of time."

Not to mention the pillow cases for kids with cancer at Smilow. And the raffle quilts and the signa-



(ARNOLD GOLD-NEW HAVEN REGISTER)

Penny Polisky of the Willoughby Wallace Quilters crochets a cap at the Willoughby Wallace Library in the Stony Creek section of Branford.

ture quilts or even the tea the group was planning for next Tuesday to present a widow with a quilt of caring. The Willoughby Wallace Quilters, in short, are not just about quilts. That's because, as Jane Dougherty, state coordinator of

the Quilts of Valor Foundation has put it, quilts are "expressions of love," but they're also functional art.

Which is to say, you can't take a nap beneath a painting. And most sculptures aren't soft and usually come with a "do not touch"



(ARNOLD GOLD-NEW HAVEN REGISTER)

Maryann Lotto (right) of the Willoughby Wallace Quilters stitches a quilt at the Willoughby Wallace Library in the Stony Creek section of Branford.

sign. Quilts are meant to be used, loved, washed, and worn out. They're meant to afford comfort. And so, as it happens, is the group.

Just ask Branford's Ann Marie Amman who joined eight months ago. Her hus-

band, a veteran of Vietnam and Desert Storm, was suffering from congestive heart failure. On the Saturday before he died, the group, led by sole surviving founder Jeanne Prota, presented him with a Quilt of Valor.

Right then and there, "I decided this was something I wanted to do," she said, while working on a quilt from a pattern she found in a quilting magazine.

Likewise, Penny Polisky of Branford, who was knitting a wraparound infinity scarf. When her husband was in a nursing home, the group gave him a quilt of valor. She's been coming on Tuesdays for two years and is still learning, but the biggest part is the friendship and companionship.

"It's been a life saver for me," she said, remarking that the group also gets together for military whist and theatrical productions at Branford High School.

And Branford's Peg Slubowski, who's been with the Quilters since 2010. When her position was eliminated at Unilever Logistics, Annie Collier and Dru Dodd told her, in no uncertain terms, that "you are not going to sit at home

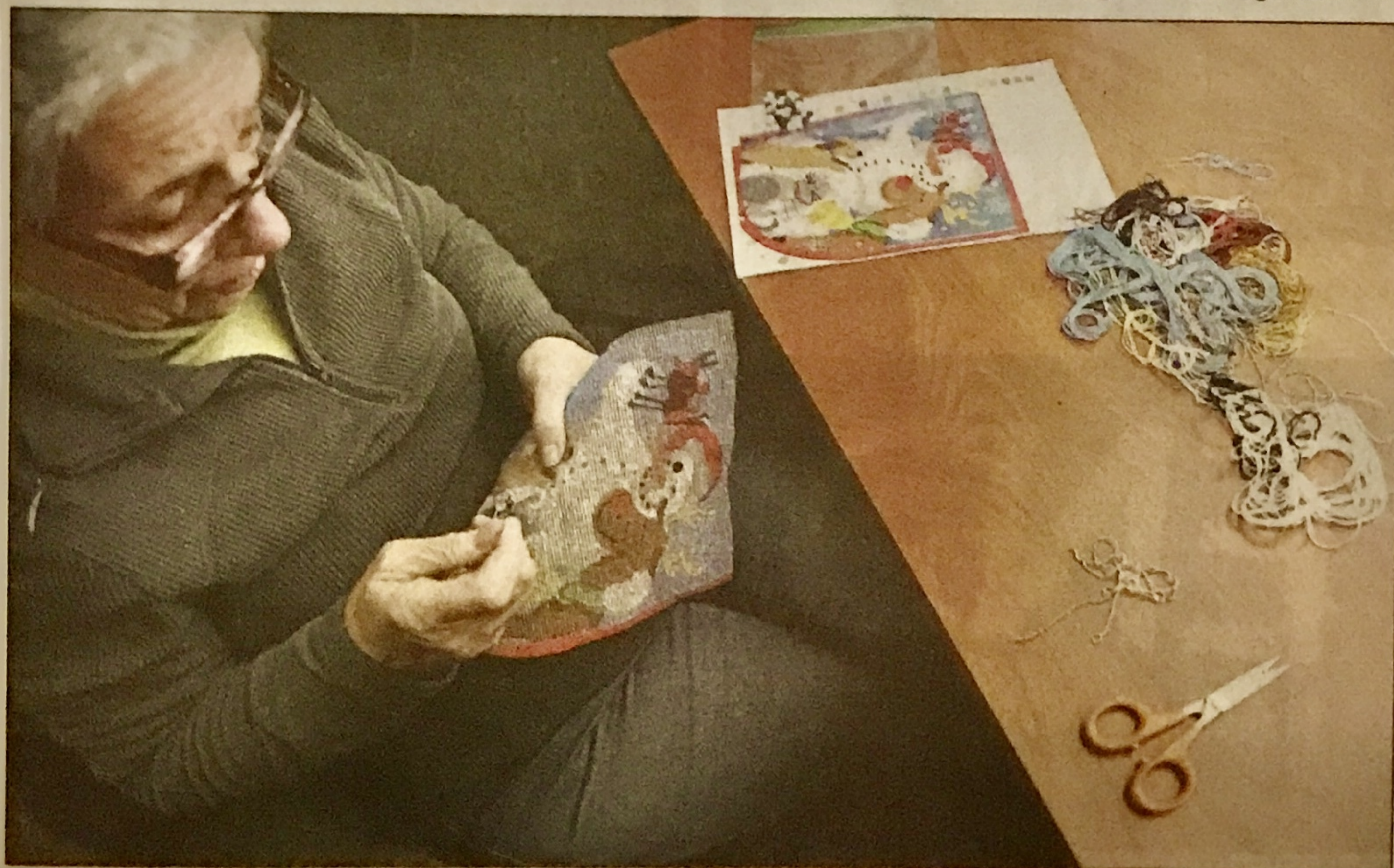
doing nothing. That's not allowed," she remembered with a smile.

Not that any of that was a topic of discussion last Tuesday. There was the rain to talk about. And the Save Medlyn Farm signs. And the dolphins and whales recently sighted in Long Island Sound. And why Towne Pharmacy is superior to CVS and Walgreens.

Around lunchtime, the conversation shifted to apples, and how one a day indeed keeps the doctor away, the report on the news that high protein diets cause heart attacks in women, and the perfection of Kit Kats, and how we needed the rain, and when the rain would stop.

In other words, just another Tuesday with the Willoughby Wallace Quilters at the library in Stony Creek.

The Willoughby Wallace Quilters meet at 10:30 a.m. each Tuesday in the conference room at Willoughby Wallace Library, 146 Thimble Islands Road, Stony Creek. The group turns no one away but it is suggested that prospective members bring a chair to be safe.



(ARNOLD GOLD-NEW HAVEN REGISTER)

Pat Cahill of the Willoughby Wallace Quilters works on a needlepoint Christmas stocking at the Willoughby Wallace Library in the Stony Creek section of Branford.