Making Masks and Lifting Spirits

In the Spring of 2020, as the pandemic spread across the country, Debbie Walker, a full-time dishwasher at Cleveland Commons, found herself temporarily furloughed and with a lot of newfound free time on her hands. In response, she decided to create a quilt memorializing the challenges that she, her coworkers, and the rest of the Whitman community faced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Walker, who has worked for Bon Appétit for 21 years, hoped for the quick return of Whitman’s students. “We were so happy to have the kids back on campus,” she says. “Most folks were thrilled to have the Whitman community back in the fold.”

Walker, a full-time dishwasher at Cleveland Commons, was a great source of joy and laughter for many of her coworkers. “When the kids came back, it was great to hear their music and see their energy. It was like a light that shone through the darkness of the pandemic,” Walker recalls.

However, the pandemic didn’t just affect the Whitman community. It also had a significant impact on the Walla Walla community. “It was hard to see all of the changes that occurred in our community due to the pandemic,” Walker says. “We started seeing a lot of people in need, especially those who were unemployed or had lost their jobs.”

Walker, along with her coworkers at Bon Appétit, started looking for ways to help the community. “We started making masks for the medical community and started cooking for local hospitals,” Walker recalls.

In addition to making masks, Walker and her coworkers also started preparing meals for the Walla Walla community. “We started making meals for the homeless and for those who were struggling to make ends meet,” Walker says.

The quilt Walker created was a way for her and her coworkers to remember the pandemic and the challenges they faced. “I wanted to create a quilt that would be a reminder of all of the hard work we did during the pandemic,” Walker says. “I wanted to create a quilt that would be a way for us to remember all of the people who helped us through the pandemic.”

The quilt now hangs on a wall of the Cleveland Commons kitchen, and it serves as a reminder of the challenges that the Whitman and Walla Walla communities faced during the pandemic. Walker hopes that the quilt will serve as a reminder of the strength and resilience of the Whitman and Walla Walla communities.

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