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JULY 12, 2020 • \$2.00

Tireless Eden COVID ward worker wins \$20K bedroom makeover

BY MACON ATKINSON
Special to RockinghamNow

EDEN — After winning a \$20,000 bedroom makeover for her work during COVID-19, medical technician health-care worker Linda Dillard has become something of a local celebrity.

"I got recognized in the street, going to the grocery store, and this lady was like, 'it's you!' the grandmother said, chuckling. "I was like, 'oh my god.'"

Dillard, an Operating Room technician at UNC Rockingham Health Care here, will receive the makeover — a comprehensive redo of her bedroom from Marta Mitchell Interior Design, a residential and commercial firm in Greensboro.

After launching its "A Haven for a Healthcare Warrior" contest in April to give back to the community during the pandemic, the Gate City decorating group received more than 100 nominations.

But Dillard stood out from the start.

Selected for her excellence at work during the COVID-19 pandemic, Dillard was the first member of her tech team to work in her hospital's coronavirus unit — a task she described as daunting.

"It was a little bit frightening at first," Dillard said. "Am I going to be safe enough? Am I going to be prepared to help this patient out, to make them feel comfortable?"

Linda Dillard was first in her UNC Rockingham Health Care team to clean coronavirus ward, comfort patients



Linda Dillard and her supervisor Misti Weadon visit the COVID-19 ward at UNC Rockingham Health Care where Dillard works as an Operating Room technician.

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But as she interacted with her first patient, her fear dissipated.

"I realized the patient is going to be there until they leave, not being able to be around their family. That's home until they get back home," Dillard said. "Just bonding with the patient, it made me happy."

When she exited the unit for the first time, Dillard described her experience to her coworkers, calming their nerves by answering questions and explaining the environment.

She would go on to provide care for multiple coronavirus patients during the first few months of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

"She's loving and caring, she cares about other people, but it extends even outside of the hospital," said Misti Weadon, Dillard's supervisor. "I can't say enough good about her."

In fact, when Weadon first found out about the giveaway, Dillard was the 'first and only' employee she nominated,

she said, describing Dillard's habit of going beyond what's expected in her own tasks and aid to colleagues.

And when Dillard isn't giving her all on the job, the Rockingham County resident is caring for family, including five grandchildren and her mother, she said.

The makeover award is a way for Marta Mitchell designers to offer tangible comfort and appreciation for the healthcare workers during an unprecedented health crisis, said Peter Mitchell, firm marketing manager.

"We were seeing these stories of people coming home exhausted at the end of their shifts, collapsing at home, going back to work the next day and doing it again," Mitchell said. "So we thought, 'wouldn't it be great if we created a bedroom makeover for somebody?'"

The gift is comprehensive and glamorous, allowing Dillard plenty of choice and voice in the final look, Mitchell explained.

Worth up to \$20,000, the makeover includes a bedroom designed in the style Dillard likes, repairs to flooring and walls, painting, rugs, lighting and more. So far, Dillard says she fancies the colors hunter green, burgundy and beige for the project, planned for completion by the end of December.

The rules for the contest were simple, and plenty of worthy candidates were nominated from Guilford and Rockingham counties by area hospital directors.

By June 30, a group of judges made the final selection. And as they went down the list of nominees, two doctors were instantly drawn to Dillard's name and position, Mitchell said, noting they wanted to recognize someone working behind the scenes — someone who wouldn't typically receive attention.

When Dillard first found out she had won, she didn't believe it. Then she cried.

"It's truly incredible," she said. "It's overwhelming, it's exciting."

Describing herself as a 'people person,' Dillard said she loves to talk, joke and laugh with her patients as she cares for them. Sometimes she feels like she knows them, despite never having met them before, she said.

"I love to make people happy, make them feel good while they're there," Dillard said. "Just being around people, coworkers, the different faces that come and go, the bonding with them."



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Dillard received a glass knot sculpture to symbolize her commitment to teamwork and bonding with her colleagues and patients.