



Guilford County Schools

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Senior Spotlight: Jana Yan

Jana Yan has gotten used to the soreness in her shoulders and hands.

Over the past year, she has spent up to 11 hours a day hovered over a sewing machine, stitching together mask after mask for people she didn't know and organizations she saw on her computer screen.

Those organizations needed the masks because of the global pandemic, caused by COVID-19, and they found Jana through Facebook, her website or simply through the cyber grapevine on social media.

Now, even with the mask mandate lifted nationwide, Jana is far from slowing down. She knows nurses and doctors think the lifting of the mask mandate is premature. So, she'll keep on making masks and branch off into making other things like scrub caps.

She'll donate everything she makes as she gets ready to start the next chapter of her life.

She'll graduate today from Northwest High and head to Vanderbilt University, where she'll double major in medicine, health and society and human organizational development.

Jana plans to go to medical school. But she can't help but look back at the past year and think about how Guilford Mask Project reached schools, organizations and people as far away as Greece, Africa and a tiny island in the Pacific Ocean.

It all started with a question. And she said yes.

The Impact of One Request

The question came one day in mid-March 2020 as North Carolina and everywhere else began to lock down because of the pandemic.



Jana's dad, Kelvin Yan, works as an electrical engineer at Qorvo, and he was talking one of his co-workers whose wife works as an emergency room nurse at Duke Medical Center.

He told Jana's dad about his wife's worry about the lack of personal protective equipment, known by everyone as "PPE," to protect themselves against COVID-19.

Jana's dad then told his co-worker about Jana's Etsy monogram business, Personalized Monograms and More. Jana had started her Etsy business nearly two years before and turned a small room in their home into her office filled with rolls of fabric.

The co-worker had a question. That one question changed Jana's life.

"He asked my dad, 'Is there any way your daughter can make some masks and give my wife a few?'"

Jana says. "At that time, stores were running out of

all the materials and all the elastic needed to make masks, but I already had all that fabric at my house.

"I was one of those people who would buy things they liked and bought a lot of it, and if no one liked it, I would still buy it. So, I was prepared during the pandemic."

She gave the nurses 20 masks. That was her first 20 -- the first of 15,000 masks she has made.

"I saw a need in the community, and honestly, everyone I was talking to was trying to make the mask themselves, and they didn't have the material," she says. "And all these other people were buying out the material, and I had all this material at my house, and I knew I could make a few."

"But it turned into a lot more than I expected, and I never expected to do this project as long as I did," she says. "I thought it would last, maybe, three months."

Not quite.

'Made With Love'

The headquarters of the Guilford Mask Project is really one room in Jana's house.

"It's a small, tight room," she says. "There are three desks for each sewing machine, and all the cloth takes up the other half of the room. There's also the ironing board and the steamer. So, it can



be overwhelming if you stay in there too long. It's, like, really crowded."

Jana did have help, though. Like her dad.

He would wash and iron all the cloth and make them as sanitary as possible. Then, Jana would put them together.

Jana knows her way around a needle and

thread. Her paternal grandfather, a tailor from Singapore, gave her a sewing machine when she was 7, and he taught her how to sew. She later bought an embroidery machine and started her own Etsy business.

With creating monograms, all Jana had to do was set it up and push a button on the embroidery machine. But with making masks, she had to work with one of her two sewing machines. She'd cut the cloth, run it through the machine, stitch it, attach the elastic and be done.

In just under four minutes.

When she got really busy with orders, Jana could make 270 masks in a day.

When it came to delivering her orders, Jana's dad drove her to the post office because she didn't have a driver's license. She then would ship anywhere from 50 to 1,000 masks and include in her package a note that opened with: "Made with Love."

The note continued: "It is our hope that these masks will aid in the safety and health of (name of organization) during the outbreak of COVID-19."

With the help of social media and Jana's contacts, orders started pouring in. Jana soon needed more help than just her dad. More help came.

Thank You Jana!

Jana began receiving free fabric from fabric.com, and after getting her driver's license last fall, she drove herself to the post office to ship her orders. At first, her parents paid for the shipping of her first 5,000 masks she made. After that, Jana covered all her shipping from donations.



Meanwhile, she found 16 volunteers to help her with everything from washing and ironing the fabric to cutting the fabric and the elastic. They shipped Jana the materials so she could make the masks, or they made the masks themselves. Then, the orders went out the door.

The volunteers came from Michigan, Florida, Virginia, North Carolina and Washington, D.C. Her volunteers ranged in age from 17 to 75, and they all

came together because they loved sewing, and like Jana, they saw a need.

“Not many people sew these days,” Jana says. “It’s a lost art, and it was difficult to find people. But the people who found me were mostly older people who had free time, and they’d see stuff on Facebook and reach out.

“And they’re a lot faster than me in sewing. They can do 400 masks a day.”

The mask requests coming into Jana’s website, guilfordmaskproject.org, arrived from everywhere — as close as Northwest High to as far away Greece, Uganda, Gambia, Hawaii and Micronesia.

There was a refugee camp in Greece and a youth-led non-profit in Uganda as well as schools in Gambia, Hawaii and on an island near Papua New Guinea.

Jana never put her name on the packages she sent. But some recipients found out who she was.

The recipients sent her notes. A principal in Hawaii sent her a surfboard. The school in Micronesia sent her a video, and it’s located on Weno Island, which occupies 12 square miles in the Pacific Ocean and sits nearly 8,000 miles from Northwest High.

The school’s video is nearly seven minutes long. It’s all images, words and music with the message coming in at 1:37 into the video that states loud and clear how the students at Akoyikoyi School feel: “Thank You Jana!”

The video also shows students holding handwritten notes to Jana, written in crayon, in English, with drawn hearts around sentences like, “we can use them to be saved (from) coronavirus. Your (sic) the best.”

“Honestly, I didn’t expect it,” Jana says. “But it’s a reward for all the hard work and love you put into making the masks. You see those videos, and it’s a driver that keeps you going.”

Lessons Learned

It was two years ago when Jana helped create her first nonprofit with her brother, Matthew, when he was at Northwest High. He’s now a student at UNC-Chapel Hill, and together, they co-founded



Link 2 College Prep.

It was a tutoring service where she and her brother teamed up with 16 tutors from Northwest High and helped students from low-income neighborhoods. They all met at Kathleen Clay Edwards Library near Jefferson Elementary.

Link 2 College Prep was all local. Guilford Mask Project, Jana's second nonprofit, is all about the world. Ask Jana what she's learned, and she has an answer ready.

"I can do a lot more than I thought I could do," she says. "When I reached 1,000 masks last April, I thought I couldn't do it anymore. I was kind of burned out. But I kept doing it, and you know what, it turned out to be something good."



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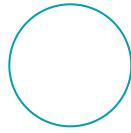
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