

## **“Painted tiles add color to lives of Mars care center residents”**

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By Kathleen Ganster

A dozen students from Aquinas Academy in Hampton brought the sunshine of a brilliant Sunday afternoon with them when they came to St. John Specialty Care Center in Mars Sept. 20.

Many of the patients there are bedridden, so the visitors are always a treat, but these young people had more than visiting in mind. They arrived to paint colorful scenes on ceiling tiles above the beds of patients.

“They came at the end of last March and it was so well received, that we were lucky to have them come back again,” said Ruth Pfeifer, volunteer coordinator at the center.

The project began when Marcia Rider, director of nursing at the center, asked Mrs. Pfeifer for assistance.

“Some of our patients are in late-stage dementia and spend most of their time in bed. We had looked for a way for some sensory stimulation and someone came up with the idea of painting the ceiling tiles that are above their beds, said Mrs. Rider. “A long time ago, some of the staff had painted some ceiling tiles, but then we hadn’t done it for a very long time.”

The two decided to reinstitute the project and enlisted the aid of their young volunteers. Allura So, now a 15-year old junior, was a volunteer at the center when she learned about the idea.

“One of the boys at school told me that the service organization at school was looking for a project right after Mrs. Pfeifer told me she needed someone to paint the tiles. It seemed like a good match,” said Allura. She rounded up four classmates in March, and the recent session attracted 12. “It’s just a fun project,” she said.

Mrs. Pfeifer bought the paint, which had to meet guidelines for fire safety, and maintenance workers at the home popped out the tiles.

The 2-by-4 foot tiles had plenty of surface for amateur artists to paint scenes. Patients had been asked what some of their favorite scenes were, and then the students worked from there. “Some are resident specific while others may be more generic,” she said.

The tiles can be popped out and moved, so if a resident tires of a scene, it can be relocated. So far that hasn’t happened, according to Mrs. Pfeifer, although maintenance people did move two of the tiles just for a change of scenery for patients.

Paintings on the tiles have included a beach scene, a sunset and one with animals. One scene was a collaboration between the students and staff member Julie Yockey, and it moved one patient to tears.

“One of our patients loved Ireland and when the students came in March, they painted a scene. Julie painted a castle on the scene like he had described to her and when he saw it he said, ‘Yes, that is where I was.’ He loved it so much tht when he passed his family asked for it and actually had it on display at the funeral hone,” said Mrs. Pfeifer.

During the students’ recent visit, Becca Faix, of Pine, decided to do a tile painted with handprints. “Allura had put signs around the school about the project and it sounded like fun. I thought it would be kind of fun doing the handprints and everyone was able to help out,” the 14-year-old freshman said.

Mrs Rider said the tiles have been well received by patients and their families. “The ones that are verbally intact have told us they love them. The families have told us they love them. Even our patients who can no longer verbally communicate, you can watch their faces and see them light up when the tiles are placed,” she said.