

Service project brings friendship, bridges generational gap

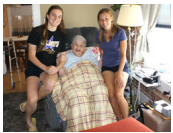
Written by Stephanie Groves

Monday, July 01, 2013 8:45 PM - Last Updated Monday, July 01, 2013 10:00 PM

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DELPHOS—What started as a junior service project for St. John’s seniors Maddie Burgei and Alicia Buettner and Delphos resident Ruth Nixon, became much more than just a project. They became friends and shared stories—glimpses into the lives of young women today and yesterday—bringing two profoundly different generations much closer.

“I looked forward to it every Tuesday,” Burgei said wholeheartedly.

“They came every Tuesday morning from September through May for one half hour,” Nixon said. “The first couple of visits we just talked. They asked lots of questions about my childhood.”

Nixon and the students became very well acquainted while playing cards and exchanging

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personal anecdotes. Nixon shared her specific birth place, the Wayne House, which used to be a hotel that evolved over the years into Numaude's and is now Baked to Perfection. She recalled when she and her parents rode the Interurban from Delphos to Lima for 15 cents.

"It was the first and last time," she said.

She explained the first Interurban (traction line) car ran through Delphos with tracks located on Second Street and that it was similar to the trolleys you see in California. The station was located where WDOH stands today. The first cars ran on Nov. 1, 1905, and the last car to run on the line through Delphos was on June 30, 1932.

There were also the family heirlooms and photos, something tangible for the students to see and touch. Nixon would detail the 'old-fashioned, close-knit' era from which she was spawned.

"I remember when Ruth showed us her mother's scrapbook," Buettner said enthusiastically. "Old advertising and nostalgia from that time was amazing. Tooth paste was a powder."

As Nixon spoke of the girls' accomplishments, there was a heart-felt sense of emotional attachment and resounding pride in her words.

"They are just like grandchildren to me," Nixon said solemnly. "Maddie volunteers and is involved with the Mission Society in Tennessee. Alicia mucked (cleaned) out horse stalls and groomed horses at a facility offering therapeutic riding courses."

Throughout the school year, Burgei and Buettner would help Nixon with "special jobs" — activities Nixon used to perform each year when she had greater mobility. They decorated the exterior of her house for Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas, keeping Nixon's annual traditions intact.

"They put pumpkins in the yard and decorated my two geese as witches, pilgrims and Santa's,"

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Nixon said proudly.

After Christmas, the students began a craft project for Nixon—a Dutch Girl-themed tablecloth—which was a touching gesture of devotion.

“It’s my treasure,” Nixon said emphatically.

The pair explained that Nixon gave them the material and they eagerly took on the challenge, ironing on the transfers and applying colorful fabric paint to the images. The collaboration between the three was a chance to explore another side of each personality as well.

“When Maddie painted, she used pastels,” Nixon detailed. “Alicia used bold, darker colors.”

There were little surprises along the way. The students gave Nixon an Orchid plant for her birthday in January, which became something they nurtured together. Prior to prom, Buettner and Burgei, along with their parents, visited Nixon to show her their gowns for the event.

“They took the time out to visit,” Nixon explained. “I think it should be important that parents take a role in a child’s life and activities.”

Both students agreed that year-long experience turned out to be very positive and much more than just a project.

“She’s just like family to us,” Burgei affirmed. “It’s awesome.”

Those words moved Nixon to tears. As she spoke, her voice cracked while attempting to hold back the surge of emotions evoked by the precious gift she had been given.

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“One thing is for certain; they made the sun shine a little brighter and my day much better,” Nixon said wiping tears away.