

Memory Makers

Club crafts frames for residents

By Sandy Marwick
Eagle Focus Editor

SAXONBURG — An American flag, toy cats, a crucifix carved out of wood. These items strike a familiar chord with some residents at Saxony Health Center. Displayed outside each room in the memory impairment area, the items serve as beacons in hallways where doorways might otherwise all look the same.

"It's a good thing because they recognize their own rooms," said Bette Jo Traggiai, activities director for residents with Alzheimer's disease and similar disorders.

"Something they like will catch their eye."

Affixed to the wall in oak boxes with Plexiglas fronts, the items also represent the caring and generosity of the Blazin' Blades Scrollers of Western Pennsylvania, whose members created the boxes as one of their service projects.

Kathy McKruit, Saxony's business development specialist, heard mention of a proposed memory box project when she began working at the center last September. She had seen the concept implemented at a Pittsburgh facility when she was touring there as part of her job.

At Saxony, the idea likely never took off because its staff of caregivers lacked time and skills to design, build and mount the boxes.

McKruit was familiar with the Blazin' Blades scroll saw club and its many service projects through her father-in-law, a member. So she proposed the project at the club's December meeting.

Club member Hobart "Hobe" Kenton of Winfield Township decided to coordinate the project on behalf of the club, meeting again with McKruit to determine dimensions and design.

"We had to make sure they were safe for residents," McKruit said, explaining why Plexiglas, not glass, was used to slide into grooves in the shadowboxes to protect the items inside. Taking into account safety and the size of contents, Kenton created kits for the 18 boxes that would measure 10 by 12 by 4 inches

"I made up kits; I cut all the pieces and took them to the (March) scroll saw meeting and passed them out to the members," Kenton said. The finished projects were returned to him at the following meeting in April.

McKruit's husband Carl installed the boxes.

Now, the boxes are filled with an array of items: Animal figurines distinguish the room of a retired veterinarian.

Religious icons were placed for a priest.

For residents whose boxes are yet unfilled, Traggiai, an art institute graduate, drew pictures of familiar items like an artist's palette, golf clubs and a sign that reads "Sing, Sing, Sing!"



Blazin' Blades Scrollers member Hobe Kenton and Saxony Health Center's Kathy McKruit talk July 27 about the items placed in shadow boxes built by the scroll saw club. The boxes are placed next to the doors of residents in the memory impairment unit to distinguish an individual's room from other doorways that may look the same.
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"It's always nice to do something like this," Kenton said July 27, upon seeing the finished project for the first time. "Someone says there's a need and you see the final product being used. I think it's neat."

With about 40 members, Blazin' Blades meets at 9 a.m. the first Saturday of each month at King's Family Restaurant in Sarver.

The club's ongoing projects include donating homemade toys at Christmastime to Toys for Tots and furnishing wooden toys to children in the Dominican Republic through a ministry in Dayton, Ohio.

The group also donates handcrafted items as Christmas gifts to nursing home residents.

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