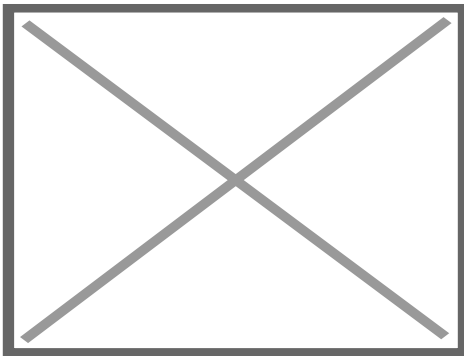


“Living today for a better tomorrow”

May 2009 is Older Americans month.

by Major Leslie Peacock, Buffy Lincoln, Karen Gleason –



Marine Lance Cpl. Jimmy Devito receives an acknowledgement from Silvercrest residents in Turlock, Calif.



Who says that getting older means spending your days in front of a TV and going to bed by 7:30? Certainly not the residents of The Salvation Army’s 37 Silvercrest facilities. Dedicated to the belief that there is life after retirement, these seniors make it a point to socialize and enjoy life even more now than when they were younger.

From “prom night” to cookie brigade to walker line dancing, the residents of the Silvercrest communities choose to not only stay busy, but also have fun—and serve their neighborhood doing it.

Originally conceived by The Salvation Army Western Territory to address the issue of inadequate care and housing for low-income seniors, Silvercrest Ministries has evolved into first-rate facilities and programs.

Turlock, Calif.

The residents of Turlock Silvercrest are a bunch of “tough cookies.” Edna Gilson has a son who is serving overseas with the U.S. Air Force. As a gesture of her love, she baked a batch of cookies for him and mailed them. Not long after, she received a request for more cookies...and more...and more.

Other residents with relatives serving overseas in the military joined the bandwagon. Currently, five servicepersons receive boxes of freshly baked goods; all made by the loving hands of Silvercrest family members.

When the crew gets together to bake, their goal is 13 batches of multi-flavored cookies. Each person chips in for the ingredients and for the postage to mail the cookies. The packages go to servicemen and women in three branches of the armed forces in Kuwait, Iraq and “somewhere in the desert.”

“That’s all we’re allowed to know,” advised Gilson.

And “they all operate on a very limited income,” added Major Debbie Hood, resident administrator.

For a year, the bakers never had a chance to witness the proof of their work. But that all changed when Marine Lance Cpl. Jimmy Devito came home from Iraq and visited his grandmother, Barbara Nilsen, who is one of the chefs.

“Their cookies are what kept us awake on missions,” Devito said. “...Their baking, their support is what helped all of us stay alive.” He added that the food in Iraq wasn’t bad. However, when missions lasted days on end, they were unable to return to camp to eat. The Marines had nothing to eat but the Silvercrest cookies.

Seeing the fruit of their labors was rewarding and encouraging for the kitchen brigade. The Silvercrest bakers have already burned out two mixers, but that won’t stop them. When asked if more cookies would be produced, Gilson replied, “Of course.”

Puyallup, Wash.

A sense of cohesion exists between the Puyallup Valley Corps and the Puyallup Silvercrest. Many of the Silvercrest residents take advantage of the corps’ senior center, which offers blood pressure checks, exercise, hot meals and bingo. They also attend the worship services—several are now soldiers.

Last Christmas at their traditional tree decorating get together, the Silvercrest staff was inspired to turn the tree upside down to decorate it. The residents loved the change; more people than ever participated. The real switch, though, came after the holidays. Instead of taking the tree down, they decided to keep it up all year and just change the decorations to match the next holiday. In January they decorated it for Valentine’s Day, then for St. Patrick’s Day, and finally for Easter.

The annual Silvercrest talent show provided great entertainment. During one entry—The New Sister Act—participants performed a line dance to “Walk the Line” with their walkers decorated in pink streamers and while wearing nun habits.

On the Saturday before Mother’s Day, the U.S. Postal Service holds its annual Postal Workers’ Food Drive. When the food arrives at the corps from the post office, the Silvercrest volunteers go into action, sorting the groceries for the food bank. They take pride in giving back to the community and receive satisfaction in knowing the food they sort will be passed out to their community for months to come.

San Francisco, Calif.

Silvercrest residents in San Francisco are getting “techy” with their new computer lab, Internet surfing and email addresses. Access—for residents only—is gaining popularity.

Every Friday, “grass skirts and bare feet day,” the residents line up for their hula dance lessons. This class is popular even with those who have no rhythm. Many come just to watch the dancing and hear the music.

The most faithfully attended event of the week is Home League, on Friday evenings, when the seniors share in Bible study and fellowship.

On Tuesdays—chess day—competition is fierce.

Two levels of English classes—beginning and advanced—are held four times a week and are for residents only. These classes were so popular that they grew from two classes to four earlier this year.

Volunteers play a large part in the social life of the San Francisco Silvercrest. Without their help, events celebrating occasions such as Chinese New Year, Valentine’s Day, St. Patrick’s Day and Mother’s Day would never take place.

Seattle Temple Corps, Wash.

At the Seattle Temple Corps, the Christmas goal was clear—to share the Christmas message and provide assistance to every Silvercrest resident. The challenge was also clear—most of them speak Chinese and Russian while most of the corps staff speak English. How could this obstacle be overcome?

Each resident received an invitation—in three different languages—to attend a program and receive financial aid. On the night of the performance, more than 90 residents and staff packed the fellowship room.

A Chinese choir sang Christmas carols in their language, followed by an impromptu chorus by the Russians in their language, then a rendition of “Jingle Bells” by the Seattle Temple daycare students. Next on the program was the message—but it had to be a message of Christ’s love without spoken words.

Corps Officer Major Robert Birks and Justin Docherty performed a pantomime that they wrote specifically for the occasion, formatting it after the words of Jesus in Matthew 25:40: *Truly I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these, my brothers, you have done it to me.*

The drama portrayed an Army officer confronting a homeless person on a snowy night. The homeless person’s coat was thin and worn and he was weak and battered by the wind. The officer removed his own coat and put it around the man; in return, the man offered his tattered coat to the officer. As the officer reached into the flimsy jacket, he pulled out folded pieces of paper.

Each piece of paper had the Scripture from Matthew written on it. Birks unfolded the first piece and read the verse to the audience in Russian. The second piece was written in Vietnamese, the third in Chinese. Applause broke out as each person connected the Scripture to the play and witnessed a visual application of the love of Christ.

After a time of prayer, residents received financial assistance enclosed in Christmas cards personally written by teenagers at the Seattle Temple Corps.

Recently, Seattle Silvercrest held a cooking party that involved the residents interacting with outside groups including the Children's Ecology Group. They cooked soup and baked cookies, enjoyed lunch together then took the soup and cookies into the community to feed the "Tent City" homeless.

Escondido, Calif.

Joining forces, the Escondido Corps Community Center and Escondido Silvercrest are making a positive impact in their community. They are partnering with AmeriCorps to create a program called CrossRoads. AmeriCorps is a grant program that offers educational scholarships to youth based on their community service hours. At Silvercrest, AmeriCorps teens serve in leadership and mentoring capacities to court-appointed and at-risk youth, working with them to serve and engage the seniors.

The program creates a caring environment for the residents to play group games with the teens and enjoy live piano music and sing-alongs; it also provides tutoring possibilities among the seniors, AmeriCorps staff and youth.

Plans are in the works to upgrade and expand the program, and to involve more seniors in community leadership roles.

North Las Vegas, Nev.

Residents of Silvercrest North Las Vegas have a staunch supporter in Terri Davis, the local assistant fire chief who never fails to attend their monthly birthday celebrations. Despite her hectic schedule, she always finds time to be with the seniors for their special days.

Recently, Mike Montandon, North Las Vegas mayor; Major William Raihl, Clark County coordinator; Major James Gallop, corps officer; Samantha Maxwell, Silvercrest manager; and several residents honored Davis at a ceremony in the mayor's office, where she received an award for her support of the Silvercrest folks.

The residents will also present her with a thank you of fresh flowers at her next visit to the facility.

"We could not do all that we do were it not for people like Chief Davis," advised Charles Desiderio, director of development and marketing.

Albuquerque, New Mex.

Keeping involved and busy are essential to life at the Albuquerque Silvercrest. Manual Rodriguez, a resident, leads art classes every Monday. Bible study—led by Stuart Merriam—is offered on Monday. And bingo is available four days a week.

A monthly free health clinic provides services including a blood pressure check, Reiki and massage therapy. AARP (American Association of Retired Persons) visits the facility at tax time, offering free tax preparation.

Residents regularly celebrate birthdays along with holidays. A recent “movie day” proved successful; more have been requested.

In the works is a weekly van service to nearby grocery stores. Most seniors don't have transportation and the stores are too far away for them to walk to and carry the food home.

Santa Rosa, Calif.

The Santa Rosa Corps and Silvercrest enjoy a healthy relationship; Silvercrest residents attend Bible study, Home League, Sunday services and Senior Club at the corps. Silvercrest reciprocates by hosting a weekly vespers service on Sunday afternoons.

Both groups share the other's vehicles as needed. Sometimes emergency transportation is required, or perhaps Silvercrest needs additional seats for a trip or the corps requires an extra vehicle to transport items; thus staff members carry keys to the other's vehicles.

During the Christmas season, the corps is generous with financial gifts and security deposits for Silvercrest residents through the Season of Sharing program.

While an atmosphere of reciprocity does exist between the two, Silvercrest and the corps still understand and respect boundaries. “Silvercrest does not speak for the corps, nor does the corps speak for Silvercrest,” advises Sharon King, property manager. “We recognize our place in the total Salvation Army mission: to save souls, grow saints and serve suffering humanity.”

Santa Monica, Calif.

A favorite event at Santa Monica Silvercrest is “Senior Prom” night. Sorority girls from nearby Pepperdine University arrange for male fraternity friends to join them at the facility where they dance the night away with the residents. Some seniors choose to sit and visit with the students rather than dance, but either way the evening is an entertaining and energizing experience.

Senior Prom is just one of the ways Pepperdine students interact with residents. Other activities include videoing the residents individually as they talk about their life. The students spend an average of two hours with each individual.

Students teach the seniors how to use the Nintendo Wii Sports system. Favorite games include bowling, golf, tennis, baseball, and ping-pong. Not only does everyone have fun, but it's also a great workout.

It's not uncommon for Pepperdine students to drop by Silvercrest merely to chat with the residents. They also visit for poetry readings, sing-alongs and jewelry classes.

A full life

Silvercrest residents are committed to living life to its fullest, enjoying every moment. For them,

<https://caringmagazine.org>

“retirement” is a verb, not a noun.

According to U.S. government statistics, the older population is growing faster than any other age group. In 1900, there were approximately 3.1 million adults 65 years of age and older in the U.S. By the year 2000, this number grew to over 35 million. By the year 2030, it is expected to be over 71.5 million—approximately 20-25 percent of the American population. Now is the time for us to be involved in finding ways to serve older adults.

“The Silvercrest/corps programs in this article are just a representation of the many wonderful programs going on every day at our 37 Silvercrests, says Major Leslie Peacock, Silvercrest Ministries secretary. “Corps and Silvercrest alike rely on volunteers who are willing to give of their time and talents to keep these seniors active and healthy.

“Are you looking for a place to make a difference? What a great opportunity for ministry!”

Silvercrests are available to anyone who qualifies under the age and income restricted guidelines.

—Information was submitted by Major Leslie Peacock, Silvercrest Ministries secretary, and compiled and edited by Buffy Lincoln and Karen Gleason.