



RYE BROOK Westmore NEWS

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RSS students turn out en masse for Int'l Walk to School Day

First grader Eva Loor-Steinberg of Brookside Way walks to school with her mother Lucy Loor and little sister Valencia. For the fifth year, Ridge Street School students participated in International Walk to School Day on Wednesday, Oct. 9.

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Parade Sunday

The Port Chester-Rye Brook Columbus Day Parade will be held on Sunday, Oct. 13. It starts at 2 p.m. at Westchester and Hawthorne avenues in Rye Brook and processes to New Broad Street. Richard "Fritz" Falanka will lead the parade as grand marshal. Many schools and community organizations will participate including the Port Chester High School Marching Band.

Columbus Day closures

R.B. teenager uses music to reawaken memories

BY CLAIRE K. RACINE

"Can you hear that? Do you need it louder?" Josie Yalovitser asked as she fitted headphones onto a small group of senior citizens at the King Street Home in Rye Brook. At first, Renée Stewart, one of the residents, did not respond, but when she started singing along, Yalovitser got her answer.

Stewart was one of five seniors to whom Yalovitser gifted mp3 players on Wednesday, Oct. 2 following months of work on a music therapy project the Blind Brook High School senior thought up and executed.

The Blind Brook 12th grader's connection with the nursing home, however, started years ago.

"She's been coming to us since she was nine years old. Our residents just love her," said Beverly Peltz, who works at the King Street Home and organizes the recreational activities.

"I don't think anybody really expected it to be going on for seven, eight years," the teenager said.

Yalovitser tries to perform for the seniors at least every other week and especially makes an effort for holidays. Nowadays it is folk songs,



Two of the seniors at King Street Home that Josie Yalovitser worked with listen to their personalized playlists. From left: Renee Stewart, Josie Yalovitser and Leopold Herman.

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sometimes in Russian or Hebrew, on the guitar and show tunes, classical music or her own compositions on the piano.

Peltz, who described Yalovitser as a

"modern-day Mozart," said the seniors enjoy listening to Yalovitser's original compositions mixed in with their favorites.

"I always liked music," said senior Leopold Herman, who never played an instrument himself. "I appreciate others who play."

He always enjoys when Yalovitser performs, especially when she plays pieces she wrote herself.

"She makes you appreciate music more," Leopold Herman added. "She plays everything very nicely."

Oftentimes the seniors join in and sing along when Yalovitser plays songs they remember.

"They might not remember their room number, but they remember the lyrics to songs they heard 50 years ago," Yalovitser said.

As many of the residents at the King Street Home have memory problems, Yalovitser often has to reintroduce herself week after week.

After so many years, however, it does not faze her. "I think I've just gotten used to it," the Talcott Road resident said.

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Music as therapy

During her time at the nursing facility, Yalovitser noticed how the music could make the residents perk up. They would start nodding their heads and tapping their feet to the beat.

"I started thinking how can I help improve their memory and help their minds," she said.

She got to researching and soon came across a plethora of information about music therapy, particularly for elderly people.

"It kind of inspired me," she said.

Peltz arranged for Yalovitser to meet with a group of residents and long-term patients. Some people did not want to participate because they were vehemently opposed to recorded music.

"I tried to focus on the ones who had memory problems and narrowed it down," Yalovitser explained.

Next, she compiled a list of several hundred songs from the 1920s to the '70s, adding the main hits from each decade. At the beginning of the summer, Yalovitser started getting together with the seniors and about five stayed interested in the concept. Yalovitser started spending one-on-one time with them. Although she often started her sessions with a couple questions, most of the seniors were not interested in that, at least not until they'd heard a couple songs, then they would start telling her little details about their lives.

"The way they'd just wake up was indescribable," Yalovitser said. "It was amazing."

When Yalovitser played The

Andrews Sisters' "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy," all of a sudden, Stewart started talking about the end of World War II.

"The day the soldiers came home, they were so nice. It was great for all the ladies," she told Yalovitser.

"It's just amazing to hear this person's whole life, and the music brings back a few small facts," Yalovitser said.

Based on their likes, Yalovitser created individualized playlists of about 100 minutes of music or 25 to 30 songs for each of the five seniors. Favorites across the board included Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Doris Day, Glen Miller, Stevie Wonder, Ray Charles, Louis Armstrong and music from "South Pacific."

"I tried to make it as personal as possible," she said. "It was definitely a lot of work. That's an understatement, really."

Seniors sing along

The personalization was worth the effort when Yalovitser heard the seniors start singing along to their favorite songs once she placed the headphones on them.

"I like to sing," said Stewart, a fan of music from the 1930s. "I don't have a good voice, but I like it."

Soon Stewart's rendition of "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered" was joined by Herman's "My Funny Valentine."

"He likes it, too," Stewart said.

"I like Frank Sinatra. I like classical music," Herman said. "I like mostly all types of music."

Herman also enjoys spending time outside, which is what he was

doing when Yalovitser showed up. With his new player he'll be able take the music outside with him.

"I'd like to listen to music outside. It makes it a lot more interesting," he said.

Listening to the songs Yalovitser put on the mp3 player makes Herman nostalgic.

"It makes me think of when I was younger and happier," he said, but was quick to add that he did not mean that in a negative way. "It's not depressing. It sounds very good."

When both Herman and Stewart started to sing along, Yalovitser was pleased, but not shocked. When Zelda Cohen started to quietly sing, however, Yalovitser could not believe it.

Cohen trained to be an opera singer but did not end up pursuing that as a career.

"She gave it up and became a school teacher instead," her husband Marvin said.

Still, Cohen sang often and instilled a love of music in their daughter who became a musical theater actor. In recent years, however, the singing stopped until that Wednesday.

"She hardly talks," Yalovitser said. "I've heard her hum before but never sing. It's amazing."

Moments such as that made all the hard work, compiling the songs and saving up money to purchase the equipment, worth it for the teenager. Yalovitser purchased the mp3 players using money she saved up from teaching music lessons and a small fundraising concert in the town where her relatives live in Russia when she visited them over the summer.



Josie Yalovitser fits a pair of headphones onto Zelda Cohen while her husband Marvin curiously watches on Wednesday, Oct. 2.

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Yalovitser plans to add more songs to their playlists as the mp3 players still have a lot of memory space, especially because she thinks Stewart may get bored and need new ones. She would also like to get more seniors involved and even try the program at another nursing home.

"It's such a great way for improving someone's memory and getting someone's brain working,"

Yalovitser said. "It's not just something for pleasure. It's something that can really help medically and physically as well."

Both music and medicine fascinate Yalovitser, and she enjoyed the chance to bring them together for this project. Music will always be a part of her life, she said, even if she goes a more science route and ends up studying neuroscience when she goes to college next year.