

Senior living facility uses art to build confidence, memories

Alex Holmquist
news editor

Creativity isn't something that's lost with age, as residents of a local senior living facility can attest to.

Residents of Oak Meadows Senior Living in Oakdale recently participated in a community mosaic project that will be displayed in the facility's memory garden. The project was led by local artist Anne Krocak through COMPAS, a nonprofit organization based in St. Paul that fosters art participation in schools, healthcare settings and senior living facilities throughout Minnesota.

Pat Samples, an independent contractor who coordinates senior living artist residencies for COMPAS, said the organization received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts for activities for seniors in the metro area and selected Oak Meadows for this particular project because they'd had a great experience with another artist residency in the past.

Krocak, whose art has been displayed throughout Minnesota, in Washington, D.C., and at museums such as the Smithsonian and with government agencies such as the National Center for Disease Control, led a project two years ago in which residents made memory tiles for the facility's memory garden, and said she was excited to return to Oak Meadows this year.

"It's just a gift to be there and hang out with everyone there," Krocak said.

Samples noted that research has shown these kinds of arts activities have many benefits for seniors, including generally improved health, fewer doctor's visits and medications, better muscle strength and balance, and less depression.

"The health benefits alone are extraordinary," Samples said, adding that these kinds of art activities also offer senior living residents the chance to get to know their neighbors and learn something new.

"I get very excited when I see older people whose lives have many limitations get to express their creativity in this way," Samples said.

Project a success

Krocak said she and the residents who participated in the mosaic project first brainstormed about what kind of design they'd like to see in the community mosaic.

"We became public artists," Krocak said, explaining that each resident was able to create a mini representation of the things they loved in their tile piece for the community mosaic. Some chose animals, rainbows, places they enjoy, or representations of other items, such as a smile to symbolize a person laughing.

The artists then glazed the tiles, grouted the piece and worked nearly all day for three days to put it together.

"Everyone was very invested and worked very, very hard," Krocak said.

As part of the project, the residents also wrote a poem about Oak Meadows, Krocak said, and each resident was also able to



Clockwise from top, artist Anne Krocak and resident Agnes Swiger unveil the Oak Meadows mosaic to be placed at their memory garden gate. Dorothy Kusch holds her personalized mosaic piece at the artist reception at Oak Meadows Aug. 9. Her artist statement mentions that she loves to smile. Agnes Swiger and Cecil Ross talk with visitors during the Artist Reception at Oak Meadows Aug. 9. Besides creating her own mosaic "Lips," Agnes was part of the program to unveil the Oak Meadows mosaic. Cecil added a few jokes to the program. The Oak Meadows mosaic for the memory garden was created by residents.

photos by Linda Baumeister/Review

create his or her own miniature mosaic to keep.

"I think people were really enjoying the process," Krocak said. "I think they were very proud."

Kim Prayfrock, director of community relations at Oak Meadows, said she, too, felt the project was a major success.

"It's just so amazing when people think they can't do something and then they do it," Prayfrock said, adding that some residents were hesitant about participating in the project before it started.

"I learned that a person should not give up the idea he can't do something before he tries it," said Vick, a 78-year-old resident at Oak Meadows. "I did not want to even try the experience but was very happy and made the attempt to be creative. It was enjoyable."

Lorraine, a 90-year-old resident at Oak Meadows, said: "I never knew anyone was capable of doing what we all did. At first I didn't know what it was all about, but once we got into it, it was super."

Prayfrock said residents who gave feed-

back on the project said they learned new ways to be creative, built relationships with others through participation, and would like to continue participating in similar activities or new artistic activities if they were available.

Prayfrock added that even residents who didn't participate in the art project were excited to come to the artist reception where the community mosaic piece was unveiled. A line of people gathered at an artist reception earlier this month.

Prayfrock said that she believes projects like this demonstrate that creativity isn't something people lose with age, and that these kinds of art classes help seniors build their confidence when they realize they can complete them.

"By the end, they were all completely sold," Prayfrock noted. "I think we should do these every day."