



## TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

### **Bayview bridges gap between youthful students, local seniors**

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Saint John \* Myla Lewis scurries up to the wall of frames and excitedly points out artwork by a friend. The drawing of a happy snowman, hung low to the ground at the Loch Lomond Villa, is at an appropriate height for the small second-grader.

She and fellow Bayview Elementary School student Christopher London stopped by the nursing home to check out festive works of art by other classmates, plastering a section of wall. One of the Villa's residents pops over and asks the kids how Santa will travel with no snow on the ground.

As brief as the exchange is, both sides are left smiling after a minute of joking.

Those heartening moments are not uncommon, either, for Bayview students and Loch Lomond residents after a lengthy partnership.

Sandwiched between Loch Lomond's "The Villa" and "The Village" residences in east Saint John, staff at Bayview Elementary have forged a fruitful relationship with the nursing home that delivers as many educational opportunities as smiles.

A Bayview class visits a residence at least once per month to meet with residents and perform songs or poems or read with and to the seniors. The school is likewise invited to Loch Lomond events.

The nursing home also installed the "Bayview Art Gallery" - that section of wall Lewis and London were admiring at The Villa - which showcases new student artwork every month.

"It's like a living gallery because it changes all the time, and when our boys girls go over there, they're quite excited to see their artwork in the frames," said Bayview principal Jill Baxter.

"It's pretty cool," said Lewis of seeing artwork by she and her friends displayed at The Villa.

"I just like posting pictures. It just makes me feel like when they walk by they get a smile on their face."

London said the art usually falls in tune with the seasons.

"I really like how they put a lot of people's up, and the thing I like about giving it to other people is that it's nice," London said.

Both sides teamed up to construct a learning garden with wooden seating and raised garden beds on the path between Bayview and The Village. Baxter said the gathering place, which opened this fall, will be used to further bridge the school and the nursing while also creating chances for science-based learning.

The partnership, which is continuing to evolve, was established through the Partners Assisting Local Schools initiative, known as PALS.

PALS is an initiative that partners the local business community and service agencies to give schools in the Saint John region educational opportunities. It officially launched at Prince Charles School in 2001 and has grown to include 31 schools, nearly 200 PALS and community partners and, over the years, thousands of volunteers.

Bayview Elementary, the K-5 school with about 230 students, joined the program in 2008.

The Villa has been the school's primary partner in recent years, and its principal said the value in connecting the youth with elders from the area is enormous.

It underscores the school's emphasis on linking its students with the community.

"That's the key," said Baxter. "We want to create authentic learners and have them be great citizens."

Ensuring the students have access to learning opportunities outside the four walls of the classroom is also important to the school, she said.

"Being outside in the real world is where life happens. They need to be able to function well and with confidence and to know what's out there," Baxter said.

Plus, for students like London, it's whole lot of fun bringing some cheer to the neighbours. He said he can see the faces of residents light up as they perform.

"I see there is a lot of smiling, a lot laughing because they are really funny songs," London said.

Up next: the school and the nursing home will further develop the garden by having the students grow various types of plants and vegetables, such as pumpkins and specific flora that work in tandem with the school's lesson plan on butterflies.

Baxter said they would also like to grow salsa vegetables to pull and make salsa in concert with the seniors to sell the school's fall fair.

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