

# Kelso fourth-graders deliver bird houses to grateful seniors



Roger Werth / The Daily News Wallace Elementary fourth-grader Makenzie Stephenson signs Rose James' name on one of the seven bird houses that were given away to residents at Park Royal nursing home in Longview on Tuesday evening.

By Brenda Blevins McCorkle / The Daily News The Daily News Online | Posted: Thursday, November 18, 2010

From now on, when Josephine "Joe" Bochart looks out the window in the social room at Park Royal nursing home, she'll have a more interesting view.

And some birds in the area will soon have new homes.

Seven birdhouses, brightly painted with flowers, stars and stripes, animals and handprints, were brought to the nursing home this week. Students at Wallace Elementary School in Kelso painted the houses and gave them to Park Royal residents who'd entered a drawing.

Bochart's was one of the names pulled out of a hat. Sitting in her wheelchair, she cradled the birdhouse on her tummy during a recent interview.

"Oh, I like it," she said. "It's beautiful. They did a good job."

The birdhouse project was a team effort between Big Brothers Big Sisters Columbia Northwest, Lower Columbia CAP and Wallace school.

Steve Webb, construction supervisor at CAP, came up with the idea. He approached Tobie Crocker, program coordinator for the Cowlitz County office of Big Brothers Big Sisters.

Webb's mother was in a nursing home for nearly 21 years, he said. He noticed how much she and her fellow residents enjoyed visits from children and watching birds out their windows, he said.

"(Steve) was in my office one day and said, 'I have always wanted to make bird houses with young people to give to older folks,' " Crocker said. "I said, 'Well, I can probably partner with you ... to make that happen.' "

While Webb built the birdhouses with materials donated by Judy Smith of ProBuild, Crocker and Diane Wheatley organized a painting party at Wallace school.

Cans of Sherwin Williams paint — given to the project by the local store - lined the school's cafeteria tables. The kids daubed on colors from small black bowls.

Nineteen families gathered for the event, which included pizza from Vernie's. The painting party, which was funded by a \$200 private donation, included roughly 100 people, Crocker said.

Crocker took photos of the children and their families working on the birdhouses, with each of the youngsters including written information about themselves. Crocker attached photos and folded each into a card, which accompanied each birdhouse to its new owner.

"The families were so wonderful, so engaged, so interactive with each other," Crocker said. "They all came up and shook our hands and thanked us for doing this."

Some of the kids are Big Brothers Big Sisters participants. Rachelle Thomas, a 10-year-old Wallace student, has a Big Sister through the program.

She helped give out the birdhouses at Park Royal, accompanied by her younger brother, Jayden Harbert, and mom, April Maxwell.

She said that making the birdhouses was fun, but she liked giving out the houses the best.

"It was nice to know who got to have my birdhouse," she said. "It was fun, and it was nice to meet some people."

Resident Marshall Jackson received Rachelle's house. Jackson, who worked as a mechanic at Cowlitz Clean Sweep in Longview before suffering a stroke in June of 1999, complimented the Rachelle on her work.

"It's sturdy," he said.

Nine-year-old Secret Shero said she also enjoyed painting the birdhouses.

"It was fun, but I really liked giving them away," she said. "That was extra fun."

The nursing home residents each volunteered to have their bird house hung outside in the nursing home's patio area.

"That way we can see them out the window when we're visiting," Bochart said. "We can watch them make their nests."

Wheatley said that the project meant a lot to the kids who took part - not just because they got exercise their creativity with paint.

"Our kids are very giving," she said. "Being able to give back to the community that gives so much to them means a lot. It was something that they all jumped on the bandwagon for."