

Montgomery News (montgomerynews.com)

Souderton Independent > News

Souderton Area High School students, Peter Becker Community residents share in memoir project

Thursday, March 10, 2016

By Bob Keeler

bkeeler@21st-centurymedia.com

@bybobkeeler on Twitter

FRANCONIA >> A visitor asking for directions to where the Peter Becker Community residents and Souderton Area High School students were meeting together at Peter Becker was given the directions and told, "You'll hear them."

Approaching the room, the sound of conversations spilled out.

The March 8 get-together between the students and the residents was the second one, following one in February, Janelle Rambo, Peter Becker volunteer coordinator, said.

"I haven't seen anybody stop talking yet," Rambo said.

The students are part of a creative writing class working on a real world project, SAHS English teacher Elise Brand said.

"In class, we're studying biography, particularly memoir, which has the creative element to it," Brand said. "Who better to write a memoir about than people who have a lot of memories to share?"

Peter Becker residents volunteered to be part of the project, Rambo said.

The students wrote a letter introducing themselves and asking some general questions, after which Peter Becker staff matched up students and residents for the memoir project, Brand said.

On April 13, there will be a breakfast and presentation at the school of a book the students will write containing memoirs of the residents they interviewed, she said.

"We're calling it a celebration, the celebration of the whole book," Brand said. "Part of that celebration will be the sharing of the stories, presenting highlights."

Each of the students and the residents interviewed will receive a free copy of the book; additional copies will be available for purchase, she said.

The Peter Becker residents are also invited to bring guests to the presentation; most have already signed up to do so, Rambo said.

There were 19 students who interviewed an equal number of Peter Becker residents, Brand said.

One of those interviewed was Sarah Caccese, who said she has lived at Peter Becker for nine years.

"I'm a graduate of Souderton High School, class of 1945, what's left of us," Caccese said. "Very good years. I loved Souderton."

The high school moved in 2009 and the old one was demolished last year to make way for planned new development on the site.

"I really could've cried when I saw they just levelled the school. It was there so many years and it touched so many lives," Caccese said.

"The new school's beautiful," she said, but, "I really will not have a connection to it like we did with our school."

Caccese, who was interviewed by 11th grader Liz Kratz, has six children, 10 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

She and her husband, Anthony, have been married for 65 years.

"I'm not giving him back. I was very lucky, I had a good husband, very loving and very understanding," Caccese said. "We had a very good life. Ups and downs, but that's everybody's life."

Kratz said one of the differences she noticed between her life and Caccese's when she was Kratz's age is that Caccese's parents were much stricter.

"I didn't go on my first date until I was 18 years old and I had to be home by 10 o'clock," Caccese said.

"I had my first date when I was 14," Kratz said.

"I really didn't have a social life until I was married and I was 23," Caccese said.

"My mom encourages me and my sisters to go out and have friends," Kratz said.

Today's values are different, Caccese said.

"I'm not saying it's bad," she said. "It's just a different time."

When she was growing up, they went to visit other family members every Sunday, she said.

Caccese said she was in the writing club at school and wrote for the school newspaper. Kratz said she has also written for the school paper.

"If you can live my life, honey, you're gonna be very happy," Caccese said.

"I hope so," Kratz said.

"Any bumps that come along, they go away," Caccese said.

Caccese said she used to be quiet but has become more talkative in recent years.

"I was 80 years old when I found my voice," she said.

Caccese said she thinks Kratz “got an earful” during the interview.

“This is about making writing real, making publication accessible and recording history in our community,” Brand said.

It is the first time the memoir project is being done, but she expects to do it again in the future, she said.

“I would like to continue to record local history through a project like this,” Brand said. “Essentially, that’s what we’re doing and it’s done by the very people that live in the community.”

Healthy communities include communication between the generations, she said.

“The more mentors that young people have, the more well-rounded they are and the better able they are to succeed,” Brand said.

The senior citizens taking part have an opportunity to tell their story to someone new and feel respected and that they have something to share, she said.

“Everybody benefits,” Brand said.

There have also been other projects involving SAHS students and Peter Becker residents, including a women’s literature class that interviewed female Peter Becker residents and a war stories class that interviewed military veterans, she said.

“I think having that experience encouraged some of the residents to sign up for this class,” Rambo said.

Brand said she had earlier thought the students and Peter Becker residents might run out of things to talk about before the end of the two-hour March 8 session.

“I don’t see that happening,” she said as the conversations continued.

URL: http://www.montgomerynews.com/articles/2016/03/11/souderton_independent/news/doc56e1b4778b008331489088.prt

© 2016 Montgomery News, a **21st Century Media** Property