

November 1, 2009

Geneva BLESSINGS

...And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Genesis 12:3

BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING ACROSS THE STREET

When Pastor Jeff first began encouraging Geneva members and friends to get "Jesus in our hearts, the Bible in our hands, and our feet out the door," Lorraine Lively thought right away about volunteering at the South County Adult Day Services Center. Since she lives in Laguna Woods Village near Gate 14, the center was practically at her door step. "Volunteering there seemed like something I could do," Lorraine says.

Her first duties were in the kitchen, which serves two meals a day for clients, plus snacks. The food arrives prepared. Lorraine, with other volunteers and staff, helped dish it up. After a while, the long periods of standing got to be too much for her. Instead of giving up, she got another job. "Now I play Pokeno," she says, laughing. "I can do that sitting down!"

Pokeno and Prayer

Once a week, on Wednesday afternoon, Lorraine spends about two hours playing Pokeno, a Bingo-like game, with several gentlemen clients. Everybody has fun, including Lorraine. But there's more involved than cards and chips.

"You get to know people," she says. "You get attached." She remembers an especially keen player who suddenly stopped coming to the center. She missed him and was concerned. "You wonder what happened and hope they're doing well."

When a gentleman seemed off his game one Wednesday, Lorraine asked if he wasn't feeling well. "I've had a rough week," he explained. "They're talking about taking away my drivers license." For a number of center clients, being able to drive themselves provides a measure of treasured independence. "Would you like me to pray for you?" Lorraine asked. "Oh, yes," the man replied. "I prayed all week," she says. The next Wednesday her friend was smiling again. His license has been extended.



Another of Lorraine's Pokeno friends is visually impaired. Still, he always seems to know when she arrives. "Come and sit by me!" he calls. As the game goes on, Lorraine helps him count cards and taps her finger on the board to show him where to put his chips. "Lorraine is always smiling and joking around with the guys," says Joni Rice, Activities Coordinator at the center. "They say, 'Where's our Lorraine?'"

"I Like People!"

Lorraine also helps keep the Pokeno prize cart stocked. She knows what each player prefers and buys accordingly—from paper towels and canned fruit to chocolate bars and chicken noodle soup. "It's easy for me to pick up a few things when I shop," she says.

Lorraine is completing her second year of volunteering at the center. "I do simple things," she says, "but they're helping people. I like people! I'm enjoying myself!"

Originally from Iowa, Lorraine lived in Apple Valley, CA, for many years. She worked for 35 years as a clerical office manager for the California Department of Rehabilitation in Torrance, Los Angeles, and Long Beach. She and her late husband, Bob, moved to Laguna Woods Village and became Geneva members about seven years ago.

HOMEWORK, HAPPY NOISE, LOTS OF POSITIVE ENERGY, AND A BETTER CHANCE AT A GOOD FUTURE

It's 2:30 p.m. on a Tuesday afternoon, and the elementary schools of the Saddleback School District are out for the day. The doors of the Iglesia Park Family Resource Center burst open, and within minutes the center is filled with children, laughing, talking in English and Spanish, running to find a place at one of the long tables in the center's large main room. The Homework Club is in session.

All of the kids, who range from first to sixth grade, have gotten homework packets at their "regular" schools with assignments for the week. Most of them will need some kind of help to do their homework. Many have no English-speaking adults at home. Some speak very little English themselves. A few have come from Mexico very recently.



In the past, the Saddleback School district has provided some tutoring for the 90-plus students in the Homework Club, including tutoring in English. This year, there's no money. District programs have been dropped. That's where six Geneva volunteers come in, most of them at least twice a week.

Helping When Little Hands Go Up

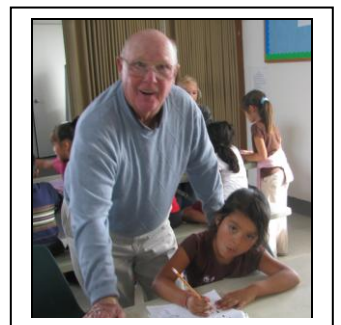
As the noise level rises, Joan Burge, Marlene Carr, Carol Frogue, Judy Portillo, Jerry Ryman, and Marion Salvage get busy. "Little hands go up, and I go to help," says Jerry, a retired naval aviator. "Sometimes it's spelling, sometimes it's checking work." Carol, a retired elementary school teacher, sits with a little boy to review his lesson. "I have teaching skills," she says. "It's fun to use them again." "You get really interested in these kids," says Marion, a retired nurse who has taken special courses to teach at the Presbyterian Church of the Masters preschool. "You want to see them do well."



"I walk around and look over shoulders, to make sure they're doing their problems right," says Judy Portillo. Judy is a special education teacher in the Capistrano Unified School District with a background in math. For Marlene Carr, the Homework Club offers the opportunity to combine her experience as both a kindergarten teacher and a music teacher. "They need to know English letters and sounds to do their homework," she says. Marlene makes up songs that teach the kids their letters in a fun way. Joan Burge, also a retired nurse, is currently working with kids fresh from Mexico who are having their first U.S. school experience. "You're doing really well," she encourages a small boy as they read together.

Seeing the Light Go On

About half an hour into the hour-long session, the room is crackling with energy. "That's what the kids give me," says Joan. "Positive energy!" "It's such a pleasure to do this," Jerry says. "Sometimes you can just see the light go on." "Getting the extra attention here helps the light go on," Carol adds. "Most of these kids don't get much attention at home." "I love how upbeat the children are," says Marion. "Extra attention does make a difference. That's something I can give them." Marlene agrees: "This is a way to share my strengths."



Judy sums it all up. "This gives me stimulation and enjoyment," she says. "I like being here very much."

