

Oak Meadows Residents Tell Stories of Their Lives Through Clay Tiles

By Mary Buelow

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The Community Room at Oak Meadows Senior Living was bursting with chatter and scents of clay Monday afternoon. One artist, 20 residents and 12 volunteers participated in a metro-wide effort to promote health improvement and engage seniors through a clay tile art project.

The Art of Aging at Oak Meadows is one of 23 artist workshops being held in senior housing sites around the metro area between January 2010 and June 2011. This event, a collaboration between Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA) and Minnesota Creative Arts and Aging Network (MnCAAN), is focused on helping the residents gain artistic skills while reflecting on their experience of aging.

According to MnCANN's website, older adults experience documented benefits from artistic learning with a professional artist such as cognitive improvement, increased satisfaction through feelings of accomplishment, increased social engagement and overall improvement of health.

Local artist, Anne Krocak, is leading the residents in the three-day workshop that includes memory sharing, creating tiles and creating a book about their experience. The men and women focused on key moments, values, people and experiences throughout their lives, such as jobs, family, hobbies and volunteering. After the residents established what they wanted to focus on, they pulled it all together on a clay tile that told the story of their lives. The completed tiles will be fired off location and brought back to be painted by the residents later this week. "I love being a part of this and hearing their stories. It's an adventure of beauty and art that has been rewarding for both the residents and I," Krocak said.

Cecil Ross chose a variety of items to represent different parts of his life; a plane for his love of travel, a dollar sign for his career as a stock broker, a boat for his stint in the Navy and a golf club for his dedication to his favorite sport. "This was fun, but I'm glad I have my helper," he said of the volunteer sitting next to him.

Another resident hard at work was Dorie Dahlberg. Dahlberg's tile told the story of her life through the representation of her faith and the love she has for her 12 foster children and 12 grandchildren. She also sponsors and writes to 12 children around the world through Compassion International, a child advocacy ministry. "I always have been very passionate about the welfare of children. I have focused much of my life on that," Dahlberg said. Carl Mathern spent the majority of his life as a farmer in Iowa. He created a large tile in the shape of an ear of corn while he recapped on his life. "I loved this project, I had a great time creating, sharing and reliving my memories," Mathern said.