

Celebration of GrandPals at Montgomery Village



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The dining hall at Chartwell Montgomery Village Retirement Residence was full, last Friday, May 30. It was a very mixed bag of ages attending the festivities that were in progress, for this was the celebration of several months, of kids coming to meet their GrandPals. The din of conversation was cheerful and the tables were surrounded by smiling faces.

Here is what they were all so happy about: this was the culmination of the good times youngsters and seniors had had visiting, to talk and get to know each other.

This was the day the youthful students, in this case from grade five, saluted their GandPals with stories and poems before the whole assemblage. One boy, Alan, stood at the mike, reading the poem he had written for his GrandPal, all about that gentleman's dare and do during WWII. It was very thoughtful and cleverly put together. There was real affection in the piece.

This time around, there were 17 GandPals and 54 students, sitting at the tables. Their parents and siblings had been invited to attend as audience to hear the stories and reap the pleasure of seeing the difference the connections with the seniors had made to their children.

It was a fine affair and the students and their GrandPals had dressed for the occasion. The tables were covered in dessert items as treats for the event and the noise of conversations was a happy buzz. It was calmed, however, for the poems and the story telling,

during which there were plenty of surprises, both within the stories and the work that had gone into writing them.

Deciding to bring students and seniors together in a reasonably well thought out program with a degree of structure as a guide, might seem, in many ways, a no-brainer. There are already buildings in which, on one side, there is a day care centre and on the other, a seniors' home, so that visiting the one with the others is easy and beneficial to all.

In as much as we tend to move about more these days, many grandchildren are not living close to their own grandparents and both miss the connection, perhaps more than they may understand themselves. So, the idea of creating friendships across the age gap is good to realize but, it turns out, rather complicated to put into action.

It is very much worth the effort.

As it happens, setting it up is a big project, requiring considerable effort on the part of the people doing the organizing.

Originated as a program at Montgomery Village Public School in 2015, this is a meeting of minds and life experiences between the young and the elderly. It has been picked up by some of the other schools in Orangeville and the Rotary has expressed an interest in supporting the project.

The organizers at the school have actually produced a website with clear instructions and suggestions as to the best way to establish the program. In this, they emphasize the importance of choosing carefully the match between the young and the elder, to secure ways in which neither will be intimidated or bored.

In choosing the match, the interests they may have in common are an important part of the thinking. Not really surprising is how easy this is to find. Even with the considerable generation gap, some things in life are constants and conversation can flow from there.

In the notes on planning, there is a real emphasis on not being worried about asking inappropriate questions and to learn the value of recovering from being uncomfortable with each other. As the the questions are asked, in both directions, communication opens up, common ground is discovered and the fun begins.

Another part of the program is the correspondence between the young people and their GrandPals, which is, as the older people prefer, by hand written letters. An interesting way to introduce students to cursive writing and the importance of completing such a task as nearly perfect as possible. When they come to writing their project about the life of their GrandPals, these are to be presented to the audience at a gathering like the one on May 30.

Thus, excellence of production is very important and students are offered lots of help with this, possibly from their parents, librarians and others. What good lessons these are for what will be expected of them in their future lives in the world of work and business.

Back to the celebration the Citizen attended on May 30, we had the chance to talk to some of the participants.

Anne, one of the seniors, told us, 'I've been involved for four years. This is my fourth year. I really like talking to the young people and I enjoy their visits.'

Her young people were Kaia, Gabe and Amvita, who had had a wonderful time getting to know Anne and hearing about her life and what it was like to be their ages in her own time. That and so much more they learned about her, while telling her about their lives in these times.

Another senior lady, Wendy, was there but her young pal was not. Last year, she had been with a small group but one child was not able to do well with the situation as it was. This year, Wendy agreed to share her time with that child at the school on a one to one

basis.

She commented. ?I did it through Big Brother, Big Sister as well. It was a really good experience.?

The website is grandpals.ca. It is worth looking at, just to read the many comments ? some are very moving.