GlamourGals bring miles of smiles to senior citizens

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Wednesday, April 20, 2016 8:13 AM

OTTAWA — Ottawa-Glandorf High School’s Chapter of GlamourGals has brought miles of smiles to women who reside at area senior homes. OGHS Junior Katie Fuetter got the idea to start a chapter of the national GlamourGals foundation when she attended a leadership conference workshop last summer.

“I absolutely loved it and thought our community needed it,” Fuetter recalled. “I brought back the idea to our school.”

GlamourGals inspires and organizes teen volunteers to provide complimentary beauty makeovers, including manicures, makeup, and facials to women one time a month. It is more than just makeovers, though; its main premise is to advocate the connection of generations and making seniors feel valued. Rachel Doyle founded GlamourGals in 2000 while she was a junior in high school as a community service project. It was officially incorporated as a nonprofit in 2002. Today, there are nearly 100 chapters throughout the United States. GlamourGals has received recognition from the New York Times, the Oprah Winfrey Show, and the CBS Early Show.

Fuetter, who is employed part-time at the Meadows of Kalida, encouraged her friends, classmates, and other students to join the organization. Currently, O-G’s chapter boasts 60 members. There were so many girls in the chapter, they decided to split into two groups with two sets of officers. They hold monthly meetings to plan events, and they take turns traveling to an area nursing home on a monthly basis. Thus far, the GlamourGals have visited The Meadows of Kalida, The Meadows of Ottawa, Heritage Assisted Living, and Hilty Memorial Home. GlamourGals requires high school groups to have an adult advisor. Ottawa-Glandorf High School Biology Teacher Holly Flueckiger volunteered her time for the position. Flueckiger has been impressed with the young women’s involvement and enthusiasm with the program. She enjoys watching their interaction with the seniors.

“The first time was a little scary, but now, the girls are so awesome with the ladies,” Flueckiger said.

Flueckiger has included her daughter, Kaleigh, a kindergarten student, with the group so she will be exposed to and appreciate the elderly.

GlamourGals National provides chapters with disposable tools to ensure the makeup used is sanitary. Volunteers never use any sharp tools, apply eye makeup, or do hair. O-G’s chapter has provided special activities with their “ladies”: they made bouquets of paper flowers to take them (Kaleigh helped decorate the vases); they did a photo booth at Christmas-time, complete with props; they made bracelets; and they have played Bingo.

“The ladies love their Bingo,” GlamourGal Liane Siefker said. “Some even bring their own chips!”

“We wanted to do this inter-generational activity to show younger girls the importance of taking care of our seniors and to not be afraid,” Flueckiger described.

The heart of the GlamourGals organization, though, is the relationship building. Nearly every GlamourGal revealed her favorite part of the events is listening to the ladies’ stories.

“For my first visit, (the lady) and I were talking,” Devon Basinger related. “It came up we both like art. She had a lot of artists in her family, and she has the art in her room. She showed me the artwork.”

Katie Fuetter recounted one lady’s family lived in Texas. The lady traveled a lot; she was born in Japan, lived in Greece, and worked as an equestrian tour guide in a Mexican resort.

“She told me, ‘I’m an adventuress!’” Katie said, grinning. “She was sad she could not be around her horses. Offering that visitation and time brightened her day.”

OGHS Senior Amber Herman said she and one of her ladies compared prom adventures.

“Her parents had to get pictures, and it’s still the same way!” Herman marveled.

GlamourGal Alyssa Schnipke, who also works part-time at The Meadows of Kalida, knows the ladies enjoy the Glamour Gals’ visits.

“They always ask when they are coming back,” Schnipke declared. “They’re excited to see younger people.”

The ladies seem to truly enjoy the GlamourGals efforts. While at Putnam Heritage on Sunday, the room was buzzing with conversation as the younger girls performed the makeovers. Heritage resident Dorothy K revealed, “I thought I might as well get the works!” Resident Betty H. beamed the entire time she got a hand massage. Flueckiger has observed when GlamourGals have returned to a facility, not only do the same ladies come back and bring their friends, but different ladies also attend. Fuetter keeps track of all volunteers’ hours. Each girl works toward her Hot Pink Progress Hours, which can be listed on scholarship applications. Fuetter plans to start a GlamourGals chapter at the college she will attend.

In these times when many teens are concerned about themselves, the GlamourGals are creating a movement of compassionate young ladies who are working to build relationships with senior citizens.

“It’s not just about helping the seniors feel awesome about themselves, but the attention we give and to show we care about them, Fuetter said, adding, “There’s no simpler gift than your time and attention.”