Carlton Senior Living resident Pat Mayo receives manicure from College Park junior and Glamour Gals member Isabella Triana.

Glamour Gals: High School Students and Carlton Residents Glam It Up

By Alison Clary

Last month, 20 residents and 11 high school girls happily participated in a Glamour Gals event at Carlton Senior Living Center in Pleasant Hill. Glamour Gals Foundation is a national organization that inspires conversation and companionship through complimentary beauty makeovers given by teen volunteers to seniors living in residential care. The nonprofit believes “senior care should not be limited to food, shelter, and healthcare.” An estimated 60% of seniors in residential homes never receive visitors. Being separated from family and community contributes to loneliness and isolation, which studies have shown make an undeniable impact on mental and physical health. Glamour Gals provides a unique opportunity for people from different generations to get to know each other through the power of touch as well as conversation.

Molly Taylor, a high school junior, started the chapter of Glamour Gals at College Park High School and explains, “Skill level is not a factor. The main goal is to make connections with the seniors. Glamour Gals sends us free supplies, including nail polish, lotion, foundation, blush, lipstick, face soap, and face lotion, and we provide women with manicures, facials, and some light makeup.” Molly says men are more than welcome to come, but the makeovers tend to attract women more often. “Even people who don’t want a makeover are welcome to come sit, watch, and visit!” At the beginning of the first
visit, one resident demurred and said, “Oh, I’m too old to be looking in the mirror,” but Molly reassured her that she was beautiful. After several residents had blush applied to their cheeks, everyone gushed at the pretty new look. Some residents have memory issues, but the girls are patient and accommodating.

The Glamour Gals slogan is “Makeovers and manicures are just half the story,” and these intergenerational visits benefit both age groups. Residents receive services that make them feel pampered, respected, and appreciated. They also benefit from the girls’ youthful energy and tap into a different type of cognitive stimulation, all while gaining a boost in confidence in their appearance. High school students chat with the women one-on-one and learn about their interesting pasts, perhaps gaining nuggets of wisdom about history and different cultures along the way. They might also gain a new perspective on aging and get that feel-good effect from nurturing a vulnerable local population.

Carlton’s Personal Expressions Manager, JC Paleja, observed how much the girls and ladies all loved talking to each other: “Residents love visitors. Every time we have an intergenerational opportunity, I always see a different spark in their eyes and lots of smiles.” These monthly connections provide both parties with a sense of purpose and fill a different niche than something like teaching seniors how to use cell phones.

When it was time for the students to leave, one resident said, “Oh, please don’t go!” Fortunately, Molly’s group will return, volunteering monthly at Carlton so they can create lasting relationships with the seniors, whom she describes as excited, grateful, and interested in the teenagers’ lives. “I have learned the importance of reaching out to people I wouldn’t normally make connections with.” Molly hopes they can visit more senior homes in the future and wants to keep the club alive after she graduates, perhaps opening a new chapter wherever she attends college. For more information on Glamour Gals, visit https://www.glamourgals.org.