

Charm of children's books

Seniors join to read, dissect stories

By Stephen Hagan

» Staff Writer

ROCKPORT — Picture books are often thought as something only children enjoy.

But the Picture Book Club at Oceanside Rehabilitation and Nursing Center tells a different story.

Stop by the Rockport facility and most days one can find some of its residents pouring over classics such as “Goodnight Moon” and “Make Way for Ducklings.” Other popular books include “The Rabbit Listened” and “The Cat with Seven Names.”

The Picture Book Club’s organizers are Lynn Finnegan, Jean Woodbury, a former teacher and dean at Framingham State University and local author of “The Tree in Dock Square,” and Tom Clark, assistant director of the Rockport Public Library.

Finnegan, a retired surgical nurse who formerly worked at Winchester Hospital and Addison Gilbert Hospital in Gloucester as well as for Oceanside, said Oceanside’s Picture Book Club has led to positive results.

“I think that it opens their minds because their previous memories are stronger,” she said of club members. “They remember these books.”

The Rockport resident said her years of nursing have given her the experience of caring for seniors who often fail to speak or engage with people.

“In this room, they’ve had an awakening,” Finnegan said. “I know I’m doing the right thing. When I come home at night, I know that I’ve made at least 15 people happy. They are delighted when they see us.”

For his part, Clark said the club has enabled the residents to “show the spark that made them who they are.”

“The familiar narratives and illustrations from picture books offered the residents comfort and a tangible connection to their past,” he said.

The club, which meets monthly, will celebrate its second anniversary in January.

Woodbury said she has enjoyed picture books since she was in college.

“I just absolutely love them,” she said. “I wanted to share my love of picture books as an adult with the residents of Oceanside.”

The books offer an art form that showcases the power of literacy and visual and musical arts in a manner that engages older readers, according to the club’s organizers.

The Rockport community has supported the book reading club, with as many as a dozen or more residents participating in the program, which includes discussion of the books that have been selected, Woodbury said.

“They really get into it and they enjoy the books,” she said. “It’s an engaging activity

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“

In this room, they’ve had an awakening.”

— **Lynn Finnegan of Rockport**



Members of the Picture Book Club at Rockport's Oceanside Rehabilitation and Nursing Center read under the eye of Lynn Finnegan, standing.

MARK WOODBURY/ Courtesy photo

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for everybody. We all walk away having learned something new. As a teacher, I learn something new every time. The biggest thing for the residents is engagement.”

Often, the books considered are recommended by the residents themselves.

“It’s enormously satisfying,” Woodbury said of the club. “It’s huge. I have personally developed rich friendships with them. The fact I can share my love of picture books with them is enormously rewarding. It’s a beautiful example of how community outreach can be so successful.”

So far, dozens of books for the program have come from the Rockport Public Library and library consortiums across the state.

Recently, the book “How My Daddy Taught Me to Dance,” by Susie Rich and “This Jazz Man” by Karen Ehrhardt were discussed.

Doug Rich, a graduate of the Berklee College of Music and a board member of Rockport Music, recently brought his double bass and played in concert with the readings.

“How My Daddy Taught Me to Dance” was written by Rich’s wife Susie and tells the story of his influence on their young daughter as she choreographed a ballet for an upcoming audition. The couple own and operate Susie’s Stories, a bookstore at 51 Bearskin Neck in Rockport.

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Bassist Doug Rich plays while Rockport Public Library Assistant Director Tom Clark reads “How My Daddy Taught Me to Dance,” a story by Rich’s wife Susie for the Picture Book Club at Rockport’s Oceanside Rehabilitation and Nursing Center.

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