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'Music lady' strikes a chord

By: M. English , Correspondent



Edele Kloss' prospective employers were looking for someone "energetic."

Seven months into her job as head art and music therapist at Plymouth Meeting's Meadow Springs Center for Post Acute Care (the former Plymouth House nursing home), Kloss' stamina level is unquestioned. As last winter segued into spring, she'd already established regular get-togethers with toddler students from neighboring Plymouth Valley Christian Nursery School. The mini-socials were a huge hit, and plans are already in the works for more sessions this fall. Kloss also recruited teen artists from Plymouth Whitmarsh High School for a recently-completed, on-site mural project and laid the groundwork for visits from Pet Therapy Dogs International volunteers. In addition, she's lined up entertainment for an October Fest program, and other holiday plans are in the works. "I've been trying different things to see what people enjoy," Kloss says. "It's fun for them to have something to look forward to. I just try to put myself in other people's shoes. You know, the old 'do unto others' thing. My mom raised me and my two brothers to think about others, and that's how I operate. "Plus I have a wonderful staff that provides daily activities, and we all work together. These are people who really care about the residents, and that makes a big difference. They always take any extra time that's needed to help someone who might be having a bad day, and there's a lot of one-on-one. "Personally, I know I'm appreciated, too. I can see that I'm making a difference in people's lives, and that's a great feeling." Kloss grew up in Delaware County's Prospect Park. At Interboro High School she was involved in "everything ... art, band, choir, gymnastics, Key Club ..." before graduating in 1998 and going on to Immaculata College. As a teen, she'd volunteered at area nursing homes and considered a career in medicine before discovering the arts therapy field and a related major at Immaculata. The profession tapped into Kloss' natural creative strengths, so she tested the waters during a "very positive" trial internship with a practicing therapist. In college, she fine-tuned her percussion, guitar, piano and voice skills, immersed herself in psychology and counseling courses and, in 2002, earned a bachelor's degree. She worked with Alzheimer's patients in Newtown Square before accepting her current position. A spokesman for Garden State Healthcare Group, the South Plainfield, N.J.-based organization that manages Meadow Springs, believes Kloss' impact on patients at the local facility will continue to expand.

"With the new focus at Meadow Springs concentrated on patients with neuro-muscular degenerative disease, Edele's role as therapeutic recreation director will broaden significantly," notes Renee Pruzansky, GSHG vice president of operations and business development. "The philosophy is that targeted recreation programs tailored to the various and diverse mental and physical capacities of each individual patient will significantly impact the patients' rehabilitation progression and overall well-being. "Specialized program tracks will ensure that each patient is enjoying several activities daily on their function level that are not only enjoyable but are mentally and physically stimulating, fostering an atmosphere of continual growth." That's fine with Kloss, who expects to complete her master's degree at Immaculata next spring.

"I love my job," she says. "The thing is, even though I've had all this training in psychology, the residents don't see me as 'a doctor.' They see me as 'the music lady' or 'the art lady,' so they're more comfortable talking to me and telling me things. If someone needs additional help or counseling, I refer them to other people on our staff. "It works out well. Because everyone on the staff relates to the residents in a different way, you end up getting a more complete picture of what's going on with the people we're caring for. And that's key to their care ... and our goal of making them happy and keeping them well." In her spare time, Kloss enjoys traveling and spends a lot of time in her 2006 Saturn taking road trips to keep in touch with college pals who have moved out of the area. "It's a pretty long trip up here to Plymouth Meeting from Delaware County, and so between working every day and going to Immaculata for classes, I pretty much live in my car some weeks," she laughs.