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By Henry Bury
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Beth Lambooy is a professional hand weaver who enjoys spending time with her prized student and teaching her the art she loves.

And Lambooy's greatest satisfaction is seeing a smile on Ruth Elliott's face as she painstakingly works on completing something as simple as a scarf or handbag over the course of several months.

The 65-year-old Lambooy has been paired up with Elliott, a resident of the Pathways to Independence support home at 248 William St., for the past six years.

She spends almost 45 minutes, two afternoons a week visiting with the 42-year-old Elliott and helping her weave presents for her family. The task is particularly difficult for Elliott because she is paralyzed on one side - a brain injury following a serious car accident as a teenager.

Volunteers like Lambooy are being recognized throughout 2001, designated the International Year of the Volunteer.

"We've developed a strong bond over these six years and she's become like a family member to me," said Lambooy, who lives less than a block from Elliott's home for the physically disabled.

Elliott said she looks forward to Lambooy's visits every Monday and Friday.

"I consider her a good friend and a confidant," she said. "I love weaving and I'm getting better at it with her help."

Jennifer Manley, a counsellor at Pathways for Independence, acknowledged the pair has struck a real friendship.

"Ruth (Elliott) is always happy when Beth comes over. The visits do a lot for her. It's the friendship that she especially enjoys and the weaving is really a bonus," Manley said.

Pathways for Independence operates 20 homes and five apartments from Napanee to Picton for individuals who have some form of developmental disability.

The William Street home is one of three designed specifically for adults who have acquired a brain injury. Elliott is one of four residents living inside the home.

The residence has a table loom which Elliott is allowed to use for the weekly get togethers with her teacher/friend.

Lambooy provides the yarn and sets up the loom for every session. Elliott chooses the colours and the project.

Elliott sits in her wheelchair behind the loom and Lambooy assists her with the weaving.

"We do it for about 30 to 45 minutes because it's physically tiring for Ruth to go longer than that...I then sew the creations together and I give them back to Ruth and she uses them for Christmas presents for her family," said Lambooy.

Past creations have included scarves, pillows and small handbags. The pair is

currently working on a wider scarf for Elliott.

"At the moment, she's doing quite well and she should have it completed by the summer," she said.

On the occasions when Elliott is not up to weaving, Lambooy will play checkers with her or she'll just sit, talk and laugh.

"She beats me in checkers every time," Lambooy said.

Lambooy said she's enjoyed her twice-weekly visits with Elliott.

"She had quite a sense of humour. She will laugh at me when I make a mistake. She's fun to work with and be with."

Lambooy said she especially likes to see Elliott happy "and if I can make her happy and create something beautiful with the loom, then that gives me great satisfaction."

Born in the Netherlands and a Canadian resident since 1968, Lambooy has been involved with the Belleville Hand Weavers and Spinners Guild for many years. Six years ago, guild members were asked if they were interested in volunteering some time every week to help Elliott weave. (Elliott had done some weaving while being a resident at Prince Edward Heights in Picton).

Lambooy said she decided to give it a try "and that has been a good decision.

"I have been weaving for 30 years and Ruth has been my biggest challenge. But she's come along great."

Lambooy recommends volunteering to anyone.

"And if you volunteer in something you're good at, then it's even nicer to pass on your gift to others."