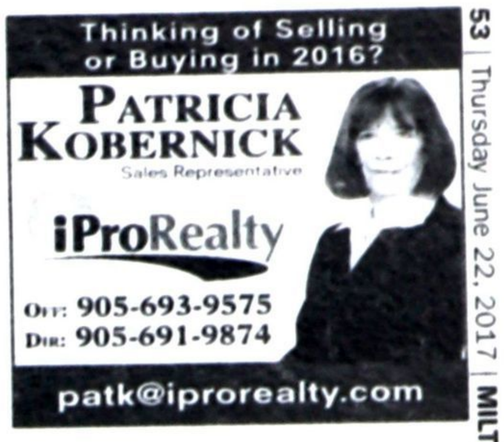

Seniors and elementary students bond over technology program

By Julie Slack
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

An affectionate gaze, a pleasant smile, a gentle rub on the back and a warm embrace: just a few of the special moments shared between a Grade 6 student and the senior she met and interviewed a month prior.

Indeed, Marilyn Hicks, a Birkdale Place Retirement Community resident and Faith Innes, a Grade 6 student have formed a friendship easily recognizable to all.

The Halton Industry Education Council (HIEC) noted the success of its innovative program, Connecting Generations Through Technology, with a Celebration Day at Milton's Birkdale Place Retirement Community last Thursday.

The HIEC program, put together by the non-profit organization that provides programming and services to help youth discover and pursue their career passions, invited seniors from Birkdale Place Retirement Community to share their stories and life experiences with Grade 6 students from St. Benedict Elementary School, who then captured these moments though video recordings and photos.

The goal is to bring students and seniors together to experience the benefits of intergenerational mentorship, while increasing awareness of new forms of technology.

The Celebration Day event offered the students an opportunity to present the digital keepsakes they created based on their interaction with the Birkdale residents.

Nervous, the students spoke to a full house of seniors, Mayor Gord Krantz, Director of Education Paula Dawson and Supt. Camillo Cipriano.

Marilyn Hicks and Faith Innes share a moment at Birkdale Place, where they attended a celebration for the Connecting Generations Through Technology program that saw Pierre Rousseau and Alex Jauregui (at right) paired up. ***Julie Slack / Canadian Champion***

And when it came time for Faith's PowerPoint presentation, Hicks whispered to the woman seated next to her, "Oh, this is my girl," before beaming with joy as she listened intently.

In total 28 seniors were teamed up with groups and individual students in Susan Aas' Grade 6 class. Most created PowerPoint presentations explaining who their senior is, what their life was like, advice they offered, and how they feel about the world today. Others created animated videos to tell the story of their seniors, while some made a comic strip.

"This program bridges the generation gap between elementary school students and local seniors — a critical part of building a healthy and strong community," said HIEC program instructor Sarah Barber. "It also provides seniors with the opportunity to network and be part of the social fabric of their community."

Almost every student who spoke expressed how nervous they were before their interview day. They worried about how their questions would be received and whether they would be brave enough to ask personal questions. For many they've never had any contact with seniors, since some of the students have relatives in far-off countries.

"I didn't know what questions to ask and I didn't know how they'd react to my questions," one student said.

Echoed fellow student Alex Jauregui, "You're scared, but then you feel comfortable and then you're friends.

"My senior will be 93 in eight days. He had two sons, one died when he was 53. He used to like golfing, but now he watches TV and reads the paper."

He wrote that his senior said: "Canada has arms open for the world. Life is good, wonderful, and life is full of detours. Life is under construction."

Then Alex shared a selfie he took with his senior — his first.

Meanwhile, Faith shared her senior's life: she was born in New Liskeard and grew up in Elk Lake. One of her memories was having a small handmade rocking chair that she used to rock so hard, that one time it made her go head over heels. She always wished she had a sibling. Just like Faith, she was an only child.

Her husband of 60 years died a little while ago, and he was very adventurous. She had a boy and two girls, Faith added.

On her bucket list of things to do is to stay healthy for the future, which Faith said she questioned since she thought her list might include travel or something else.

She also shared that she likes pretty things and the story behind them. Her job was a private secretary, before becoming a stay-at-home mom. She thinks that she likes how the world used to be.

David Ulman shared his experience with his senior, saying it was a great chance to meet new people and make friends.

"Usually I'm just playing video games, so this was good," he said. "I learned all about my senior, who was a general in the army."

He shared a selfie he took of his senior as well. "It was such an amazing experience," David said. "I would go back 100 per cent. I had a fantastic time with my senior."

Senior Jim Harper wrote a note to the students since he wasn't able to be in attendance. He said that the program renewed his faith in young people. He added that it is a great way to connect with youth and he was thankful for participating.

Connecting Generations through Technology is made possible through partnership with the Ontario Seniors' Secretariat and funding from the Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade.

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