

## Upper Moreland

# A senior-to-senior project

*High school seniors are documenting the life stories of local senior citizens.*

BY ANNIE TASKER

STAFF WRITER

Betty Heilemann, 86, hadn't thought about her time as a Girl Scout troop leader in years.

Memories started creeping back this month when Upper Moreland High School seniors prompted her to share some of her life's experiences.

"It's amazing what you remember once you start," said Heilemann. Those years as a troop leader, for instance — "I hadn't thought about it at all."

Residents of Upper Moreland retirement community Wesley Enhanced Living at Maple Village have teamed up with local teenagers to document their life stories in print and video. For the six high school students, the effort dubbed "the Greatest Generation project" fulfills a senior project graduation requirement. The retirees were prompted to participate by Wesley Enhanced Living staff, or by the notion they ought to be recording their memories for posterity.

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At the end of the day, said program director Jayne Capwell-Gibbs, "everyone's sharing skills and knowledge."

A handful of the teenagers and seniors gathered at the Upper Moreland retirement community last week to talk about how the project is progressing. Brandi Lindquist, 18, said she learned during one interview that people walked around with unpatched holes in their shoes during the Great Depression. Unajane Finegan, 73, chimed in that some people used cardboard to keep their shoes cobbled together one more day.

Another Maple Village resident shared with 18-year-old Nick Cappa that her husband, a cabinet maker, died in a freak accident after some woodworking glue caught fire; she and her children moved from their native Germany to the United States, where they all attended school and learned English. She told Cappa to do whatever it takes to further his education, he said.

There are parallels to be drawn between what's happening in the world right now and the events that shaped the retirees' youth, Capwell-Gibbs said. Both generations have had friends and family deployed to war overseas, for example; both have experienced economic uncertainty first-hand.

Both groups are also tapping each other's mental resources, with the seniors providing wisdom and the teenagers doling out technological know-how.

The Greatest Generation project began Oct. 17, when some of the retirees began an eight-week memoir writing project on Saturday mornings at Upper Moreland Middle School. The high school students helped the Maple Village residents use computers to record their memories. On Veterans Day, six high school students interviewed more than a dozen seniors on video. They will edit the interview footage and put them on DVDs to be presented at a ceremony next month.

Next semester, the project will begin again with new seniors from both ends of the age spectrum.



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“Everyone was both a teacher and a learner in this case,” Capwell-Gibbs said.

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John of the Cross, 2761 Woodland Road, Roslyn. For widows and widowers. (215) 901-2323.



**At age 86, Betty Heilemann** has plenty of memories to record — even some she had not thought of in many years.

**Gian Luiso  
Staff Photographer**

Printing imperfections present at scanning.