

Loveland & Indian Hill Life

The key to your community

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Team Effort, Art Foster Enrichment



Miami University student Audrey Zimmerman talks with a Cedar Village resident. Scripps Gerontology Center at Miami University and Cedar Village in Mason partnered with Rookwood Pottery in Opening Minds through Art.

People with Alzheimer's disease shattered stereotypes recently when they created strikingly beautiful artwork in a program designed to stimulate and enrich their lives.

About 35 residents of Cedar Village Retirement Community who suffer from Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia produced sophisticated one-of-a-kind Rookwood tiles with the help of The Rookwood Pottery Co., an iconic Cincinnati brand.

For the first time, the pioneering Scripps Gerontology Center at Miami University and Cedar Village in Mason partnered with Rookwood Pottery in an ongoing Scripps research and therapy program called Opening Minds through Art, also known as OMA.

The program shows that many people with dementia retain access to their creativity and imagination, despite having impaired memories and often lacking the ability to perform some everyday tasks.

OMA has created a structured, failure-free art-making technique that allows people with cognitive challenges to produce original works of visual art with the help of Miami and University of Cincinnati students and other volunteers.

OMA's workshops typically involve painting, printmaking or making collages. The Rookwood tile-painting gave the Cedar Village residents, who participate in OMA's weekly art program there, an opportunity to express themselves in a new medium.

The tiles were to be taken to Rookwood Pottery in Over-the-Rhine, where they will be fired. Afterward, they were set to be returned to the Cedar Village gallery exhibition. More than 100 people have attended prior exhibitions at Cedar Village.

"People tend to underestimate the creative capabilities of people with dementia," said Dr. Elizabeth Lokon, OMA's founder and senior research associate at Scripps. "We've shown that they have much to offer. When logical thinking and verbal expression are impaired, art is still available as a way for these individuals to express themselves in remarkable ways."



Elizabeth Lokon, OMA's founder, standing, reacts as she looks at a tile painted by a Cedar Village resident.

Bringing generations together

Another OMA feature is the way it creates relationships between specially trained college students and older adults, breaking down barriers between generations. Some students have described their work with older adults in the program as "transformational," changing their attitudes toward aging, giving them purpose, and convincing them that they can make a difference in people's lives.

OMA shows that people with dementia can contribute to society as artists, as teachers to the younger generation and even as learners who develop new skills.

OMA offers programs for people with dementia at nine retirement communities and nursing homes in Greater Cincinnati. The program at Cedar Village, 5467 Cedar Village Drive, Mason, is OMA's largest.

"At Cedar Village, we're constantly looking for ways to enhance our residents' lives," said Carol Silver Elliott, Cedar Village's President and CEO. "It is our obligation to provide as rich and fulfilling of an experience for our residents as humanly possible. OMA is one of many ways we do that."

In 2011, LeadingAge Ohio, which advocates for nonprofits that serve older adults, presented Cedar Village and OMA with its Excellence in Service for Nursing Facilities Award. The award is given to organizations displaying outstanding initiative, motivation and leadership in skilled nursing services.

Aside from their interests in helping older adults, the Scripps Gerontology Center and Rookwood Pottery have another connection. Marilyn Wade, who owns Rookwood Pottery with her husband, Martin, is the great-granddaughter of the late E.W. Scripps of Cincinnati, a founder of the first major U.S. newspaper chain. In 1922, he endowed Miami University's Scripps Foundation for Research in Population Problems, which later became the Scripps Gerontology Center.

"The Scripps Gerontology Center is among the most important causes we support, not simply because of our personal family involvement but because it performs extraordinarily good work -- training today's students to be tomorrow's leaders in gerontology," Marilyn Wade said. "It is with great pride that Martin and I support this center and bring the unique talents of Rookwood Pottery's artists to work directly with the OMA program."



The Cedar Village residents and students work on the tiles. OMA shows people with dementia can contribute as artists, teachers and learners.