

SPRING 2009

# WILLOW



## *When Giving is a Joy*

Burrowes Elementary School  
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# When giving is a

by Holly Fritz

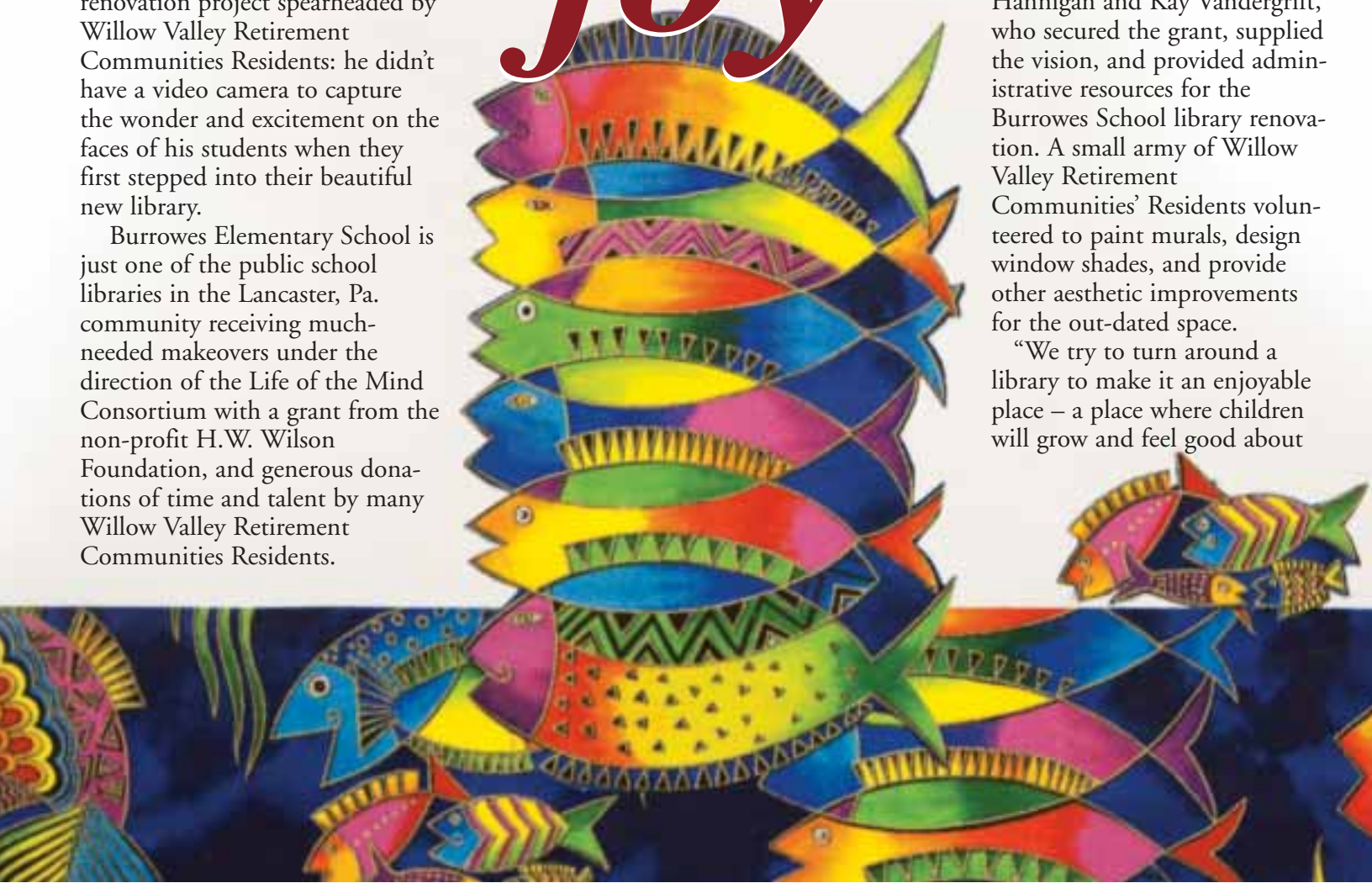
The librarian at Burrowes Elementary School has just one regret about the school library renovation project spearheaded by Willow Valley Retirement Communities Residents: he didn't have a video camera to capture the wonder and excitement on the faces of his students when they first stepped into their beautiful new library.

Burrowes Elementary School is just one of the public school libraries in the Lancaster, Pa. community receiving much-needed makeovers under the direction of the Life of the Mind Consortium with a grant from the non-profit H.W. Wilson Foundation, and generous donations of time and talent by many Willow Valley Retirement Communities Residents.

# joy

The Life of the Mind Consortium is the brainchild of Spring Run Residents Jane Hannigan and Kay Vandergrift, who secured the grant, supplied the vision, and provided administrative resources for the Burrowes School library renovation. A small army of Willow Valley Retirement Communities' Residents volunteered to paint murals, design window shades, and provide other aesthetic improvements for the out-dated space.

"We try to turn around a library to make it an enjoyable place – a place where children will grow and feel good about





themselves.” says Jane Hannigan. “Especially in the inner city schools, there are many families who are struggling. The library should be a place that’s exciting. We’re hoping to get across to the kids that we care. When you bring in art and programs, you make children think that school’s important, and that people think they are important.”

The library renovation project was a natural for the Life of the Mind Consortium because both Hannigan and Vandergrift are passionate about children, books and learning. As retired Columbia and Rutgers University professors, they’ve devoted their professional lives to teaching library science and children’s literature and consulting on public library design. Like many Willow Valley Residents, in their

retirement years they are passionate about staying engaged in intellectual and creative pursuits and in making a real difference in their community.

Kay Vandergrift says they’ve tapped a whole network of talented seniors at Willow Valley Retirement Communities who are only too willing to volunteer for these and other community-service projects. “We have such a remarkable resource of talent and experience here at Willow Valley,” says Vandergrift. “Just because we retire, doesn’t mean seniors are useless. We still have minds. We still have the ability to use the talents that we have, and Willow Valley is supportive of that.”

Vandergrift and Hannigan enlisted many of those gifted Residents to turn a dark, outmoded space into a place where children love to come and learn. What was once a dark and dingy space at the inner-city school where more than three quarters of the students live below the poverty level has been transformed into a colorful gathering spot that the children love to show off to parents and other visitors.

After nearly a year of planning and work, the grayish walls of the library have been replaced by murals brimming with color and life.

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*Burrowes Elementary School librarian Andy Wulhkuhle (left page) says the library now overflows with color and excitement, thanks to Life of the Mind Consortium founders Kay Vandergrift and Jane Hannigan (shown at left) and donations of time and talent by other Willow Valley Residents. Artists Janet Cree (below left) and Peggy Gregg (below right) designed murals for the library depicting much-loved children's literature characters.*





Old, cracked blinds yellowed with age have been replaced with bright white window shades decorated with fabric fish. Fanciful Critter Sitter stools sprinkled throughout the library

engage the imagination and invite children to pick a book, sit, and read.

“For the kids, walking into a space that’s beautiful and designed to accommodate their needs has changed their perception of the library,” says Burrowes School librarian Andy Wulfskuhle. “It has become more fun, more their place. The kids are proud of it, and love being here and learning.”

Lakes Resident Janet Cree used her expertise as an art teacher in the New Jersey public school system to design a brightly colored mural depicting creatures of the Sky, Land and Sea, an idea suggested by fellow artist Peggy Gregg.

“Kids respond to strong colors and simple shapes,” Cree explains. “I can’t tell you how many murals I’ve done. That was my stock in trade.”

The two ladies, joined by a number of part-time volunteer painters who are Willow Valley Residents,

commandeered the large tables in the Willow Valley sewing room, and painted for four hours a day for

nearly two months to complete the three-panel Sky, Land and Sea mural, as well as one depicting much-loved storybook characters.

Some were classic favorites, such as *Alice in Wonderland*, while others, like *The Flying Mouse*, were of a more recent vintage.

Window shades, with brightly colored flying fish, were created by two Spring Run Residents: fabric artist Gloria Gilbert and her husband, Paul. Paul and other Residents with engineering expertise traveled to the school to carefully measure the space available, and then crafted the wooden frames for the murals.

The imaginative book return at the circulation desk, shaped like a space ship, was designed and hand-crafted by Spring Run Residents Betty and Hank Copelman.

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Above, colorful creatures from the Sky, Land and Sea populate a three-piece mural.

Left, imagination takes flight at the Burrowes Elementary School library with the rocket ship book return, crafted for the children by Willow Valley Residents.



*A pair of carved chickadees, so exquisitely detailed that the children thought they were real, were created by Dick Gutter.*

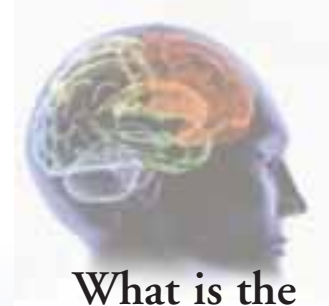
Millersville University Industrial Arts students made Critter Sitters, the stools that are hand-painted by Willow Valley Residents with everything from flowers to fire trucks. Some Residents, who weren't able to contribute their time or talent, gave generous donations to cover material costs and purchase new books and other library resources for the school.



The children weren't the only ones who benefited from the library renovation project. Residents were also enriched by the experience, not only from the pleasure of giving but also with a sense of pride, accomplishment and community.

"It was such fun doing it," says Peggy Gregg. "We enjoyed painting the murals, and the Residents enjoyed watching us. It shows what Willow Valley offers us. People don't just come here and retire. There are too many things that we can contribute to the community. There's so much talent here."

"It takes a village," says Kay Vandergrift. "In this case, it's our village. We are helping to raise children to think and use their minds in different ways through those libraries. That's important to us. This project is just one example of the philosophy of giving that's evident here at Willow Valley – nobody makes you do it, you decide to do it. That is one of Willow Valley's great gifts, and the staff and management will help. It's important that people understand that. It's the Residents at Willow Valley who are saying, "What can we do about this?" You name it, and people here are doing wonderful things. This just happens to be one of them."



## What is the Life of the Mind?

The Life of the Mind celebrates the fact that life is an ongoing quest for ideas, knowledge, understanding, and joy. Learning, working, and serving others are not the prerogatives of any one age or stage of life, and young people and mature adults working together can make a significant difference in their own lives and ultimately in the world.

Our goal is to engage in joint ventures that combine the experience, the maturity, and hopefully the wisdom of retirees with the new ideas and youthful exuberance of college and university students. Through these ventures, we share our imaginations, our humor, and our visions for the future and then work together to try to make those visions a reality.

### Getting it right!

The extensive resources of Willow Valley Retirement Communities, the large number of well-educated and highly motivated Residents, and the proximity to major institutions of higher education make this an ideal site for one of the most lively and most productive intergenerational programs in the nation. Franklin & Marshall College, Millersville University, and Pennsylvania College of Art & Design have entered into a partnership with Willow Valley.

*From the Life of the Mind Consortium website at <http://lifeofthemindconsortium.info>.*

