



For Immediate Release
March 2, 2009

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Botsford senior citizens 'soak up love' from area students

Botsford Continuing Care Center residents will receive an extra dose of love on Wednesday, March 4 when students from a local church youth group will bring cuddly creatures infused with affection to the Farmington Hills facility.

The Senior High Youth Club from First United Methodist Church in Northville will bring 150 teddy bears to the residents, who live within the Botsford Commons Senior Community, as part of a decade-long annual project.

"Our residents just light up when they arrive," said Suzanne Lipar, recreation coordinator. "They love when students visit, and the stuffed animals are so thoughtful."

While teddy bears have long been symbols of comfort, these are no ordinary bears. Every February, the new teddy bears are donated by parishioners who bring them to church. Special tags inscribed with inspirational messages are later added.

"They sit among us in the pews, soaking up the love of God and our parishioners," said Heather Wallas, the church's Christian education director. "Our congregation loves to be a part of it, adding hugs and their own special wishes to each bear."

She added that while the stuffed animals are special, they really serve as a conduit, and starting point between the residents and students. While the teens may be a bit timid about visiting a nursing home initially, by the end of the visit they have reaped rewards as well.

"Students now look forward to this project every year," Wallas said. The interplay between generations is an important part of the project. Often, teens without exposure to the elderly population cannot fully comprehend their lives, what they have seen and done.

"They get a glimpse of what aging is, and through this project, gain an understanding and respect for their elders," Wallas said. "It's gratifying for them to see how much comfort they bring to people who are recovering from an illness, are a bit lonely or just need an extra dose of love."

Lipar agreed, noting that the mutual benefits these types of projects can have.

"After their visits, students often see them more as people who have lived extraordinary lives and have much to share," Lipar said. "Our seniors are such a valuable source of wisdom for our community, and this project allows them to share that."

Botsford Commons Senior Community is a non-profit corporation providing housing and service options for seniors. Located on a 30-acre campus in Farmington Hills, the Community offers a full continuum of care for the area's senior population including short stay rehabilitation, privately owned condominiums, senior apartments and assisted living suites. For more information visit the website at: www.botsfordcommons.org.