

Music makes memories

By Jo McCormick

Madrid Resident

In the early 1990s Golden Ours was blessed to have a lady come promoting music therapy. Shirley was an Ogallala native. Ogallala, Neb. is located just 20 miles north of Grant. Ogallala is the Cowboy Capitol and has provided many fun and meaningful resident outings to see a variety of sights.

Anyway, Shirley had gone to the University of Nebraska with a major in music. She and her husband recently had returned to the area. Shirley also had an aunt, Jean, who resided at Golden Ours. Jean had loved music and had entertained herself and many Ogallala people with organ music before MS brought her playing to a halt, but did not squelch her love of music.

Because the DON at the time, Ann, was a forward looking individual, Shirley was hired. She was a boon to our activity department because of her music background, but in so many other ways also.

Shirley had worked in several other nursing homes in their activity departments and constantly reassured me we had a very good program going. Not to be boastful, but I thought we were cutting edge also because we had so much support from our facility and the surrounding communities. It was great to have her reassurance though as I had never, and never did work in any other facility or even visit very many. The two I did visit was to see my grandmothers and in no way did I want to emulate those places.

The time Shirley was with us at Golden Ours produced so many memorable moments; many associated with her music therapy. She started a resident choir which performed for the public several times a year. These concerts provided residents with numerous chances to shine. Those who were hesitant to perform were encouraged by Shirley. Even those who had difficult speech deficiencies due to health issues could sing words they may not be able to speak and they were so proud of themselves, as we all were of them.

As I was writing this part of "Bingo and Beyond" I was also reading a Joyce Meyer book. She said, "Over and over again in the Bible we are told to lift up our hearts and sing." I read through the book of Psalms and found at least 65 verses alluding to music. One in particular was applicable to what I was writing.

Psalm 146:2 "I will praise him as long as I live; I will sing to my God all of my life."

This choir practiced weekly –up to 35 members sang just for the pleasure of it or to practice for an upcoming concert. Most concerts were staged in the wonderful large chapel of which Golden Ours can boast. We had overflowing crowds of spectators—families and friends of residents, townspeople, staff and families of staff.

Two concerts were held on the patio, one of those on a summer day with the temp at 100 degrees at concert time. Thank the Lord for a covered patio.

One concert the summer of 1992 celebrated jointly Nebraska's 125th birthday and

Independence Day for our nation. It was held in the city park just across the street, Highway 61, from Golden Ours. That required a lot of moving of residents by staff, families and volunteers. Also the piano from the GOCH solarium was transported by maintenance in a pick-up to the park and home again when the festivities were over.

A special treat was a huge birthday cake honoring our oldest resident at that time, Celia, who was 105 years old and unable to attend the celebration in the park. Her family was with her over at Golden Ours, but they wanted those fellow residents in the park to have a piece of her cake.

The institution, Perkins County Community Hospital and Golden Ours Convalescent Home, contributed a tank full of iced pop and many hours of donated labor. Families brought picnic fare to share with their residents. County Legionnaires presented the colors and even gave a 21 gun salute.

A local minister gave an introductory sermon. Local musical talent added to the festivities as well—even a banjo player. Our administrator accompanied himself on the guitar and gave a salute to servicemen by singing “The Ballad of the Green Berets.”

After the success of the first concerts we had a volunteer, a local man, Lavern, come in and video tape the programs. For several years thereafter residents enjoyed watching the tapes. These concerts happened between 1990 and early 1994 so none of the resident performers are alive now as I am writing.

I still enjoy watching the tapes. I have a few of my own copies because in several I have children and grandchildren front and center. My twin grand babies were presented to the residents by Mom and Dad at a concert when they were a mere six weeks of age. They are now 16. Their older brother was introduced by grandpa, my husband, at that concert also. He was two and a half at the time. He is now 19.

A Mother’s Day concert the following year featured the five grandkids I had at that time. Later that same year all five appeared in an “I’m Forever Blowing Bubbles” rendition. My two grandsons who were born just eight days apart were toddlers in this concert and are now also 16.

In one concert my second oldest son, Kyle, had to be a surrogate father for his brother Bryan. Bryan was a county deputy at the time and was on duty so could not help with his children.