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CENTERPIECE FEATURED

The art of staying active

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Both help pass the time, sure, but they're also activities retired school teacher Carol Stacker enjoys and now encourages her fellow residents at Burlison's Mustang Creek Estates to join in with as well.

The former elementary and high school teacher recalled the detours of her 40 plus years in education.

“Physical education is what I wanted to teach,” Stacker said when asked what inspired her to become a teacher. “And I did. At Kimball High School I had a drill team, which I loved. I was even asked by other schools in Dallas to help with their tryouts, help assist how to choose the girls and so forth. But along the way, things were needed and so I got into a bit of everything not really intending to but just to help out.”

One of those included teaching computer classes at Wright Elementary School Lubbock.

“Well, then the art teacher got a part in a Broadway musical so they asked me to help out there,” Stacker said. “When I first told them at [Mustang Creek] they thought I got the Broadway part, but I didn’t. I got the part of finishing my computer class that semester but also doing the school musical because the original teacher was gone.”

Yet another new challenge awaited Stacker.

“Eventually they decided, well, I needed to be the art teacher too,” Stacker said. “I had no experience in art nor any talent really, but I learned how to do those things and became an art teacher because they needed someone.”

Eschewing P.E. for computers, musical theater and art while not her original plan, proved fulfilling all the same. Stacker said

“I enjoyed it and learned how to teach art,” Stacker said. “It’s not so hard when you can show things from a computer onto the big screen and teach kids how to do things from that. And I learned more and gained more appreciation for it as time went by. You can’t help but learn as you’re teaching it. I enjoyed the different perspectives in looking at and creating art sort of the bird’s eye view of over the top and worm’s eye view of looking up. Plus, my best friend just happened to be an art major in college at the time so asked her for advice early on.”

Born and raised in Lubbock, Stacker said she moved to the Metroplex because the “man she was in love with at the time” moved to Dallas after coming home from Vietnam. Stacker said she’s been a resident of Mustang Creek for about two years now.

“A guy who lived across the street when I was growing up in Lubbock, he liked to hunt quail too, so we became friends later on,” Stacker said recalling her younger days. “But, when we were kids living across the street from each other, he didn’t have anything to do with me, didn’t like me. Probably I guess because I ran over him with my bicycle.”

An occurrence totally unintentional, Stacker insists.

“See, you know how you start driving toward someone to scare them but then you turn?” Stacker said. “Well I did that just playing around, but then guess what? He turned the same way. So, he didn’t like me much for a long time.”

Staying active

Stacker now strives to stay fit and engaged through offering the same services to her fellow Mustang Creek residents that she participated in for so many years as an educator.

In those endeavors, she’s realized success but calls it a work in progress.

“Some enjoy it but I have trouble getting people to come or at least as many as I’d like to see come,” Stacker said. “I want to try to get people here to stay active physically and mentally.”

Mustang Creek founder and CEO Renee Ramsey hopes to see the same.

“It’s critical for older adults to stay active and involved in their community, but also to feel useful,” Ramsey said. “When we help residents reconnect with the roles they might have had when they were younger, it can have a powerful impact on memory, give them

the satisfaction of a platform and help them foster more meaningful connections with each other.”

To those ends, Mustang Creek works off a philosophy of get up, get together, get thinking and get interested, Ramsey said.

On Stacker’s part, that means art activities for mental acuity and exercise on the physical side.

At Stacker’s request, the facility now boasts indoor horseshoes, bean bag games and a ping pong table.

“I’d have somebody in here for a game of ping pong all the time,” Stacker joked. “I enjoy it and some of them enjoy but, well, I play to win and it’s hard not to play to win. But I’ve gotten some of them in here, just not as many as I’d like to, but I keep working on it.”

Although Stacker continues to push physical fitness through games, she said she’s had more success with rocks, painting rocks that is.

“You can have fun and do anything with them,” Stacker said. “There are lots of rocks in the area here and you just have to go through and let them speak to you as to what they’re supposed to be. This one’s kind of an Easter egg I think while this one looks kind of like a growly Gus to me.”

Stacker shows off rocks painted by her and others, one rock festively Christmas decorated the design on another resembling the band of an Easter egg or maybe the stripe across Charlie Brown’s shirt.

Fellow resident and Stacker’s friend Paula Kaiser is both a fan of and quite good at rock painting, Stacker said.

“This has bluebonnets and the design on this one, I’m just kind of ad libbing right now,” Kaiser said. “This one looks kind of like a fish, but it’s actually a lady with red lips. It’s something we do to pass the time, but fun too. I love to paint.”

A copy of Rolling Stones’ guitarist Keith Richards’ autobiography “Life” peeks out of Kaiser’s tote bag.

“Love the Rolling Stones and my son gave me that book,” Kaiser said. “Have you read it? [Richards] is just crazy as a loon. My gosh! I can’t believe he’s still alive. He’s a mess.”

Keith and company are one of but not her favorite band, Kaiser added.

“Last time I was in the hospital they were doing a whole series of X-rays on my leg and the doctor asked if I liked any particular music,” Kaiser said. “I said, ‘Yeah! I love Van Halen.’ So he played them through the whole thing, which was very nice of him. I love Van Halen, my personal favorite.”

Stacker, in matters music, stays hometown true.

“Well I’m from Lubbock so I love Buddy Holly,” Stacker said. “He actually lived a few blocks from us and was about my brother’s age.”

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