

# Valentine's Day: Pacific Ridge students 'share the love'

## IF YOU GO

**What:** Share the Love drive-by Valentine's distribution  
**When:** 1 to 2:30 p.m. Saturday  
**Where:** Pacific Ridge Elementary School, 2000 Spruce Dr.  
 Seaside High School (new location), 2600 Spruce Dr.  
 old Seaside High School parking lot, U.S. Hwy 101  
 old Broadway Middle School parking lot, U.S. Hwy 101  
 Cartwright Park, 1942 S. Franklin St.  
 School staff will be at the locations ready to wave to students, pass out treats and share some love. Families of Pacific Ridge Elementary School students are invited to drive-by each location and receive a treat at each stop. All participants are asked to wear masks and stay inside the car. Staff will deliver the treats.

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"There's just so much richness there."

For the past few weeks, seniors at Avamere have put together Valentine's cards with goodies, which the teachers plan to distribute to students during the Share the Love event on Saturday.

At the same time, some elementary school teachers have been working with their kids to create fun Valentine's decorations for the retirement home that will be hung up in public areas so everybody on campus can enjoy them for a couple months.

Erica Acton, a fifth-grade teacher at Pacific Ridge, said it's been enlightening to see how the students have connected to the project. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, young people have experienced a taste of what it's like to be isolated, even housebound, or not have as much social interaction.

"There is a connection that maybe there wouldn't have been," Acton said. "My class was more understanding and compassionate about why you would want something on the walls to cheer you up. ... They're feeling similar to the way the residents do."

Zellmer echoed that sentiment, saying the residents also "feel separated from the community, so this is really important right now."

## Connecting seniors and youth

The Valentine's Day exchange is the latest step in a developing collaboration between students and the life enrichment program at Avamere at Seaside that Zellmer initiated several weeks ago.

"It fits really, really well with our strategic plan," instructional coach Cate Blakesley said, adding the district's mission, vision and goals all refer to community outreach and partnerships as part of a well-rounded and engaging education for young people.

The first step was starting a virtual story time for three kindergarten classes at Pacific Ridge. The sessions, which take place Monday and Tuesday mornings via Zoom, typically lasts about 15 minutes and involve one of the older adults reading a preselected book to the students. Zellmer invites anyone at Avamere to have a turn if they want.

The nature of their involvement can vary. Zellmer spoke of one woman who "is gung-ho about reading on Monday morning," but as she struggles with dementia, "she reminds me to remind her." Another resident attended a recent story time, excited to see the children, but he wasn't quite comfortable doing the actual reading.

"He wanted to sit behind me and hear the song," Zellmer said. "It was very fun for me to be witness. I think next week, he'll be more comfortable to do the reading."

Zellmer, a former elementary school teacher, is a big proponent of fostering intergenerational relationships, particularly between youth and older adults.

"It's a very unique relationship, especially in this day and age when a lot of people don't know many elders," she said. "The elders have so much to offer, and the children bring such a smile to their hearts."

## Looking ahead

Although the partnership is limited to virtual interactions because of the pandemic, Zellmer has a broad vision for how it could evolve in the future. She'd like to see the senior living community host pic-



Avamere  
**Jo Anne, a resident of Avamere at Seaside, creates a Valentine's Day card for a Seaside student to receive during the Share the Love event that teachers and administrators are organizing for Saturday.**

**'THE ELDERS HAVE SO MUCH TO OFFER, AND THE CHILDREN BRING SUCH A SMILE TO THEIR HEARTS!'**

Erin Zellmer  
 Avamere life enrichment director

nic, beach outings and field trips, or have the children come spend the day putting together a play with the residents.

"It gives the children a chance to see the elders in a different light," Zellmer said, adding the intergenerational element "gives them an insight into the history of that person's life, which is very different from their own."

In the meantime, she and the teachers will continue exploring virtual activities to foster the connection. From asking the young

people to lead virtual workshops on how to use various technologies to encourage the residents to share their histories with the kids, they see plenty of potential.

"We're in the brainstorming part," Acton said, adding the students know so much that they don't necessarily consider a distinct skill, although it would be useful for others. "Right now, it's super important just to feel connected to the community because we don't go places or see as many different types of people."



Fifth-graders share Valentine's Day wishes

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Avamere  
**Valentine's Day cards made by Pacific Ridge Elementary School students decorate the common areas at Avamere at Seaside.**