

Sign-language students take stage to 'Sing a Song'

By Loraine McClish
staff writer

When area senior citizens put on their "Musical Madness" revue this month, the group performing the "Sing A Song" number will have plenty to sing about.

Among that group will be friends and family of Marion Green, deaf since birth, who are rejoicing in their new-found knowledge of sign language.

They will follow the words of the song in sign language backed up by a singing chorus, "only because none of us are singers," said Helen Mailloux, Ms. Green's niece.

Ms. Mailloux is one of 12 relatives and friends who traveled from throughout the Detroit area to gather one morning a week this spring to attend the sign-language sessions offered through Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation senior adult program.

Their teacher is Ann Fogel, a Livonia resident and gerontology student at Madonna College who is interning at The Gathering Place senior citizens' center as a requisite for her degree.

She is the first intern to come to The Gathering Place who has had a hearing-handicap.

The classes she taught there have been termed by Loretta Conway, director of senior adult activities, "One of our biggest success stories."

GERONTOLOGY students are pretty much on their own to pick and choose the site of their internship, where they work for a given number of weeks with the staff in area senior centers or resident homes.

They are also, often, given their choice of the type of work they prefer to do during that time.

"It generally works out well because everybody has a talent they can share,"

Ms. Conway said. "But her knowledge of lip reading and sign language was a particularly happy coincidence for us. We have a few hard-of-hearing persons who come here regularly I knew would benefit by these classes."

Stroke patients were among the first to sign up for Ms. Fogel's sign-language classes. Others signed up so they might better be able to communicate with friends who have hearing problems. Still others signed up for no other reason than being offered the opportunity to learn a new skill.

Meanwhile, Sister Claire Nicolai, a resident at The Gathering Place and a regular at The Gathering Place, urged her neighbor Ms. Green to join the sign-language classes.

When word spread among the relatives, Ms. Fogel found herself forming a second class for the group of 12 that included close friends of the deaf woman.

BY THE TIME the class takes to the stage to show their new-found means of communication, Ms. Fogel will have completed the internship that will give her a degree. But the class will continue, meeting in Ms. Fogel's home.

"We're not about to stop now," said Mickey Bohlen, Ms. Green's sister, who is driver for the sign-language class carpool.

Ms. Green was educated in Day School for the Deaf in Detroit in the era when neither sign language nor lip reading was taught. The focus was on oral communication.

"But we never had any trouble communicating among ourselves," said Helen Green, the deaf woman's mother, who now resides with her daughter in Farmington Place.

"I never had any trouble understanding her and neither did her sisters. But the opportunity to do something like

this never came up before we met Sister Claire, who told us about these classes."

Ms. Fogel refers to the class of family and friends as "My advanced class."

"They can go at so much faster a rate in learning because they have one another to practice with," she said.

"But we still carry our (text)book with us most of the time," added Helen Douglas, another of Ms. Green's sisters. Nonetheless the group is well prepared for their "Sing a Song" performance.

Curtain for "Musical Madness" is 2 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 12-13, in Mercy Center gymnasium, 11 Mile and Middlebelt roads. Tickets are \$2 or \$1 for those under 16, at the door.



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Sign language instructor Ann Fogel (front) heads one end of the table while Marion Green heads up the other end in the sessions that are once-a-week

events. The class is made up of family and friends of the deaf women pursuing their new-found method of communication.



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Ann Fogel is majoring in gerontology with a minor in sign language working toward her degree at Madonna College. The class she led in

Farmington Hills' Gathering Place for senior adults has been called one of the program's biggest success stories.

Ilona and Gallery

Sunday painter's flowers start a blooming business

By Loraine McClish
staff writer

Hirschel Levine describes "Ilona and Gallery" as "an art gallery, a clothing store, a jewelry store, a gift shop, a family store or just a great place to visit and look."

The shop in Loehmann's Hunter Square is all that, with hand painted clothing coming up fast as the focal point.

"It all started in April when we did a wearable art show," said Ilona Vinegar who thinks of herself as a Sunday painter of the garden flower variety.

"It was the old story of I-can-do-that-too," she said. "Well, I can and I do it well. I started with jumpsuits and then sweatsuits and they all went within three days."

She's painting her flowers on blouses, bomber jackets, vests, blouses, skirts and pants.

Meanwhile her brother, sister-in-law and mother hold sway over the gallery operations as she manages up to 60 hours a week at home at the easel.

Her hope is to start selling wholesale. "But so far it is very hard just keeping up with the gallery and its demands," she said.

ON A QUICK tour around Ilona and Gallery, the browser will spot a framed antique quilt, guest towels painted to match a bathroom wallpaper, hand-crafted porcelain, tuxedo shirts with painted ruffles, rag runs, unique soft sculpture and multi-stringed necklaces.

"Every piece is an original," said Levine.

"We don't have too many well-known artists represented here. We wanted to show the work of the little-known, those who do very unusual work that has never gotten too much exposure. In turn, this makes many of our very unusual pieces quite affordable.

"Every piece of jewelry is hand-crafted," he said, referring to a large corner of the gallery devoted to the display that ran from paint-on-copper brooches to rings set with semi-precious stones.

As customers wandered about the gallery, Toni Levine was readying three outfits to be picked up for the fashion show that is now a regular Tuesday afternoon affair in Tally Hall.

The show is put together by Fashion World of West Bloomfield using fashions from all the cooperating clothing

stores in Hunter Square.

The handpainted lilies or daisies or roses on the tops, pants and jackets that are seen in the show are the hallmark of Ilona and Gallery.

THE WOMAN who calls herself "a Sunday painter" had her first adult career in nursing and her brother was in the wholesale tire business when her dream gallery became a reality about 18 months ago in Birmingham.

Within six months of that operation

the two realized they were going to require more space and set out to make their move to larger quarters in Farmington Hills.

Now, since the wearable art has put itself in the forefront of the business, Levine is in the process of garnering consultation for a mass re-arrangement of the merchandise.

"But the format will remain, with the unusual, the high quality, the handmade, and the affordable," Levine said.



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Toni Levine says she can't wait for the cold season to set in so she can wear her new hand-knitted bomber hat. She matches it up with a quilted vest and tucked-in pirate shirt, both handpainted by Ilona.



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Toni and Hirschel Levine mind the store while Ilona is becoming the fastest-selling merchandise in the of Ilona and Gallery works on the wearable art that many-faceted shop in Loehmann's Hunter Square.



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Marge Feuerman (at left), owner and operator of Fashion World in West Bloomfield, models a grape-colored cotton dress with hand-painted iris by Ilona at \$64 with many-strand necklace, an original by Heaven at \$70. The soft sculpture (center) called "Old Lace" is the work of Connecticut artist Irene Reed. At right the brown paper bags are actually vases of porcelain filled with anything that suits the buyer's fancy. Miss Feuerman coordinates the every-Tuesday Informal fashion shows in Tally Hall.