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HOLIDAY HELPING

For seniors, Friendly Aid helps drive away isolation

This is the second in a Townsman series on Wellesley Friendly Aid Association, one of the beneficiaries of GateHouse media's annual Gifts of Hope campaign. The campaign is designed to raise funds and awareness for the services and needs of local and area nonprofits.

By Anne-Marie Smolski
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Angie Wood, who lives in public housing on Weston Road, likes her apartment very much, but finds the complex where she lives can be a lonely place.

"We're trying to provide some outreach to people who live in the public housing," said Karen Mondell, program administrator at the Wellesley Friendly Aid Association.

Mondell said that Gary Canavan, resident service coordinator for the Wellesley Housing Authority, and Angie Angino, board member and past president of Wellesley Friendly Aid, originally discussed the idea of supporting the folks who live in the senior housing projects.

They found someone to offer knitting classes and Wood decided to take advantage of the opportunity. Although she is an expert with the crochet hook, Wood had never learned to knit.

Some of the knitting classes took place over at the public housing complex on Washington Street. "It was nice; it was something different," said Wood. "They have a nice big fireplace over there; they're going to get a new TV; we're still waiting for Cable."

The knitting class met on Thursdays, and someone from Wellesley Friendly Aid would pick Wood up and drive her over to Washington Street. They even served refreshments. "They're very nice," Wood said about the folks from Friendly Aid.

Some of the people in the class were Chinese. "I couldn't talk to them," Wood said, but added that there was also a Greek woman in the class. Although she couldn't talk to that woman either, Wood found it really didn't matter — she just enjoyed the camaraderie.

"I wished it [the class] was longer," Wood said.

Wood moved to Wellesley four years ago, after her husband, John, to whom she had been married for 47 years, died. After John's death, Wood had to sell her house in Sturbridge, but she wanted to remain as independent as she could. Her daughter helped her find a place to live in Wellesley.

The 81-year-old is the mother of two daughters, the grandmother of two, and the great-grandmother of six, with another on the way. When the Townsman visited, Wood was planning on spending the



Angie Wood participated in a knitting class that the Wellesley Friendly Aid Association offered to senior residents in public housing. WICKED LOCAL STAFF PHOTO BY KEITH E. JACOBSON

holidays at the homes of two of her grandchildren.

For Wood, a typical day begins with getting up whenever her dog beckons. She has a 7-year-old female Eskimo named Snowball.

"I take my pill, I take the dog out," Wood said.

Breakfast is "whatever you find. When you're by yourself you're not fussy," Wood explained. She skips lunch, and said she waits until the evening to have her big meal of the day. Wood smiled impishly when she said she's trying to watch her girlish figure.

"I watch my story ["The Young and the Restless"]; I read books." Wood's favorite genre is romance — "I get them at Walmart; they're good ones," she said, while taking a Harlequin Romance book, "The Prince of Scandal," by Kim Lawrence, out of her crochet/knitting bag.

Wood said she really doesn't have a favorite author. "I don't know one of them. [When picking a new book] I just look at the covers and I know I didn't read it."

Since Wood does her laundry in the building where her complex's community room is located, she

spends a considerable amount of time there while she's waiting for her clothes to dry. "Whoever comes in I talk to them," she said.

It's where she meets up with her friend Alice Fiola, who also lives in the complex. Although she wasn't interested in taking the knitting classes, Fiola said there's the possibility that Wellesley Friendly Aid may offer line dancing classes, and possibly Wii. She's thrilled about the line dancing.

Wellesley Friendly Aid representatives also came over to play bingo with the residents. "We had a lot of laughs with them," Fiola said.

Like Wood, Fiola has a dog. "I don't know what I'd do without my dog," Fiola said.

"They keep you company," Wood agreed.

For more information about the Wellesley Friendly Aid Association call 781-235-3960 or visit www.wellesleyfriendlyaid.org.

Donations of all sizes are welcome and may be mailed to: Wellesley Friendly Aid Association, 219 Washington St., Wellesley Hills, MA 02481.