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Vera's Generation project will benefit entire community

BY PAM STEVENS | MANAGING EDITOR

Just one person can make a difference in the life of a child and Vera Johnson, a long time resident, spent countless hours making a difference in the lives of hundreds of children in Lake Stevens. Johnson passed away on March 1, 2010.

Because of Johnson's example, a crowd gathered in Lundeen Park on June 11 to show support and have their picture taken for a grant application to Scholastic Books' "Be Big in Your Community" contest, whose mascot is Clifford, the Big Red Dog.

Vera's Generation, the team that was formed to continue Johnson's work, has applied to Scholastic in hopes of receiving the \$25,000 grant money which will not only keep Johnson's name alive but will also continue her work within our community.

The grant is designed to support those living within a community who want to make the world a better place, which is what Johnson consistently strived to do as she worked with children at Sunnyside Preschool throughout the years.

Basically, the Vera's Generation program would enlist the help of senior citizens within our community to share their talents and teach school-aged children and younger, anything they deem significant.

Vera's Generation Team Leader and Sunnyside Preschool & Kindergarten owner, Cindy Brengman would love to see a classroom created at Eagle Ridge Park where seniors and children will work together to learn and grow, just as Johnson worked with preschool aged children.

"Winning the grant will allow us to furnish a center based preschool classroom, purchase books, learning and resource materials for parents and children to be housed at the Lake Stevens Senior

Center at Eagle Ridge Park," Brengman explains.

Vera's Generation is important to the community because it has the potential to benefit each and every member of the community that would like to be involved.

"The boundaries are ageless and the possibilities are endless. Our goal is to offer a program for toddlers and preschoolers that include parents and seniors who can grow trusting relationships together and bring special interests or skills to enrich the curriculum," Brengman said. "Children can feel safe and encouraged to explore not only materials in the classroom but also their relationships with peers and adults. They feel important and valued when others listen to them, seek out their ideas, and allow them to express themselves. I believe this will also prove to be true for everyone involved in this program."

The city has plenty of people who are endorsing the program as well, including Rep. Mike Hope, Lake Stevens Mayor Vern Little, Snohomish County Councilman John Koster and Lake Stevens City Councilmember Kim Daughtry, just to name a few.

"Everyone in the community has something to share with someone. Seniors can share experiences with everyone younger than them. Toddlers can share the joy and wonder of learning things for the first time," Daughtry said. "Everyone can learn something from anyone else. Vera's Generation (our elderly) have so much to give and sometimes no one to share it with. Vera's Generation gives the community a way to do that, starting with the seniors."

Two recent high school graduates Alex Hayes and Alysia Brengman, who attended

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Community members and Vera's Generation supporters at Lundeen Parkway are joined by Clifford the Big Red Dog as they spell out the word "Big" at a grant application photo shoot.

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Sunnyside Preschool, don't remember much about their preschool years, but when asked about Johnson they most certainly do have fond memories.

"I would always get really excited after Vera would call to say she was on her way over. While waiting, we would start to gather the books we wanted her to read to us at the snack table," recalls Brengman.

Hayes' best memory of preschool was walking across the street to Johnson's house to see pollywogs in an old bathtub in her backyard and newly hatched chickens.

"That was really cool," Hayes said.

"Aside from the friendship that grew between us, most memorable to me was to watch Vera's esteem grow as she came to know and understand the value and importance of her participation in our program," (Cindy) Brengman said. "As for the teachers and hundreds of children who came to know her over the 10 years she visited our classrooms, the hugs, smiles and laughter said it all."

When, this program takes off, both Brengman and Daughtry have a vision of generations coming together to learn from one another for, well, generations to come.

"Everyone can get involved. It's easy. Do you have a talent that you would like to share with someone older, someone younger? Do you know something from the past that is going to be lost to the younger generation if you do not pass it on? The Eagle Ridge Ages program will facilitate the process and help build a stronger and more cohesive community," Daughtry explains.

Vera's Generation is also being called the Eagle Ridge AGES (All Generations Engaging Seniors) program locally.

"I would like it (this program) to be an inspiration and model program for other communities. In five years I see



Preschool parent volunteer Adam Conway (on the ladder), Lake Stevens City Councilman Kim Daughtry community volunteer for Vera's Generation, center, and Gail Johnson. Vera Johnson's son.

Eagle Ridge AGES thriving throughout our community involving children of all ages spending time with seniors doing activities such as gardening, fishing etc.," Brengman said. "Beyond that I hope to see the children and parents move up in the program as volunteers and parents who bring their own children into the same program they benefited from."

To become a part of the team that thinks this is a 'Great' 'Big Idea', or if you are interested in joining the Cooperative Learning Intergenerational Community for Kids (CLICK) contact Cindy Brengman 425-397-7799 or email BeBig@comcast.net.

