

Art-based therapy enhances lives of The Palace residents



By Kerry T. Green

It's not often that a masterpiece is created in 30 minutes. But ask Pauline Bida's family and they'll tell you her painting, Flowers for Buddy the Cat, is more meaningful than the famed Mona Lisa.

Bida created the artwork — a blue vase filled with an assortment of blue and pink flowers — during The Palace Management Group's newly launched "Art Without Boundaries." The program uses MnemeTherapy, which combines singing, movement, painting and story telling to stimulate positive changes in the brain. It has been successfully used for individuals with variety of diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's as well as stroke victims.

"MnemeTherapy is another example of the cutting-edge programming provided to residents," said Palace president Helen Shaham. "We continually seek out activities which keep them engaged, active and socially stimulated."



Delia Ferrer's Trees in Puerto Rico was exhibited during The Palace Renaissance's Art Show



Frieda Mitzenmacher proudly shows off her creation, Renaissance, at The Palace Renaissance's Art Show.

Named after the Greek goddess of memory, MnemeTherapy at The Palace involves a personalized half hour session with Certified Mneme Therapist April Atlas, who heads the Miami-Dade chapter of the Art Without Boundaries Foundation, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization.

Atlas begins each session with a song to help the residents relax. This also engages both sides of the brain: The right side is the intuitive, creative side where music comes from and the brain's left side is the logical, sequential center providing language. After a brief assessment by Atlas, the resident reviews samples and selects a painting he or she would like to recreate.

Palace Renaissance resident Roxanne Manos was a bit apprehensive because she had no experience; however, her hesitation was replaced quickly by excitement once her painting, Beauty of Nature, neared completion. "MnemeTherapy is neither an art lesson nor traditional art therapy. Residents choose what they like; I simply provide a step-by-step guide," Atlas explained. "I use singing, movement, patterning, painting, story telling and praise to help stimulate sustained attentive focus and produce an amazing painting."

The sessions often evoke memories for residents. For example, Leticia Villasanez, a resident at The Palace Royale, recalled her days in Cuba by naming her artwork Beautiful Palm Tree in Cuba. Once the painting is completed and named, residents develop a short story. In doing so, an old memory is now linked to a positive event.

The artist and his or her work then are introduced to an audience that provides positive feedback. Atlas said this praise increases dopamine levels in the brain, key to alleviating some of the mood and emotional balance issues affecting Alzheimer's patients. Recently, the MnemeTherapy artists and their work were recognized during a special art show and exhibition held at The Palace Renaissance.

"MnemeTherapy extends well beyond the half hour sessions," Atlas said. "There's a sense of pride and accomplishment as residents show off their creations to family and friends. One family was so excited about the painting that they took it home and framed it."

In addition to embracing activities for residents with dementia-related illnesses, Shaham also believes it's important to provide programming that stimulates the brain prior to the onset of these diseases. The Palace recently partnered the University of Miami's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute to bring adult education courses to Palace residents as well as Kendall's older adults.

For more information about the MnemeTherapy at The Palace, call 305-271-2220 or visit online at <www.thepalace.org>.