

Art-based Therapy Enhances Lives of Palace Residents

MIAMI—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.

Pauline 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 Mneme Therapy 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.

"Mneme Therapy 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."

Named after the Greek goddess of memory, Mneme Therapy at The Palace involves a personalized half hour session with Certified Mneme Therapist April Atlas, who heads the South Florida chapter of *Art Without Boundaries*.

Atlas begins each session with a song to help the resident relax. This also engages both sides of the brain: the right side is focused on what is happening while the left is hearing the words.

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 quickly replaced by excitement once she saw her painting "Beauty of Nature" neared completion.

"Mneme Therapy is not an art lesson. Residents chose what they like; I simply provide a step-by-step guide," explained Atlas. "I use singing, movement, patterning, painting, sustained attentive focus, story telling and praise to achieve residents' goals."

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, the artist and their work are introduced to an audience, who provides positive feedback. This praise, says Atlas, increases dopamine levels in the brain, key to alleviating some of the mood and emotional balance issues affecting Alzheimer's patients.

"Mneme Therapy extends well beyond the half hour sessions," said Atlas. "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 Mneme Therapy at The Palace, please call (305) 271-2220 or visit www.thepalace.org.

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