

Senior adult VBS brings back fond memories for 'young at heart'

By Vicki Stamps

The Pathway

The Ozark campus of the Baptist Homes & Healthcare Ministries in Missouri has found a way to reach the young at heart among its senior residents.

"We had Vacation Bible School for our residents," said Don Swadley, VBS director. "We started this last year but had a much better turnout this year. We always had 35-40 in each service, but the final service had 59."

Swadley said the residents attended, including those who live at the "Outback." The Outback refers to the independent living residence homes on the campus. Swadley and his wife, Julie, live in the Outback.

"Our campus pastor, Ron Adrian, and Pam Workman-Chainey, executive director/administrator, came up with the idea for last year's VBS, and we had another for this year."

Workman-Chainey said, "One of my favorite childhood summer memories was VBS. So, it spurred the whole idea to have a VBS here."

Swadley added, "We wanted to run it like a children's VBS. So, we started with pledges to the American flag, Christian flag and Bible. We did songs with some hand motions, invited a missionary to speak, and I did the Bible study."

'Memories'

As in all Bible schools, refreshments were an important part.

"I was basically the cookie lady," Sharon Nelson said. "I was in charge of seeing to it that we had treats. We chose cookies and lemonade."

Workman-Chainey agreed that the refreshments were important.

"My favorite memory of VBS," she said, "was the cherry Kool-Aid and the cheap cookies because they tasted so good together."

Memories played a large part in the success of this VBS.

Mary Hagler, a young 101-year-old, remembers VBS. "I've always loved Bible school," she said, "I had four children, and I used to fill my car with children and take them and pick them up."

Zeldean Munton, 88, also lives in the Outback, and she attended all three sessions of the Bible School.

"It brought back a lot of memories," she said. "I would work in VBS three hours in the morning for two weeks, and I had four sons. There was always a lot to do. I thought this was really neat and fun too."

Swadley taught the three days of Bible study. "I taught the Trinity," he explained, "I spent a day each on God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. We also had handouts that they could complete as I taught, as well as puzzles that they could take home to finish. If they brought them back the next day, they earned candy."

Implant the Word

Brad Maxey, life enrichment coordinator, worked with Swadley to develop a craft.

"We made a triangle paper weight," Maxey said. "Each side named the Trinity. There are not very many crafts that you can do on the Trinity."

Adrian agreed that the residents had a fun time and that it brought back many happy memories.

“We experimented with this last year, and it was successful,” he said. “We immediately decided to do it again. It takes a tremendous amount of effort, time and preparation to make it happen, and without prayer it doesn’t happen.”

According to Swadley, these seniors of advanced age were taken back to their childhood.

“It is always important to implant the Word of God in hearts,” he said. “We took a photo of the oldest in the group. We had a group of about twenty who were age 90 and above.”