

# Keystone softball team a hit

## Teens visit Cincinnati retirement community on spring break trip

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LAGRANGE — Keystone High School's junior varsity and varsity girls' softball teams excel on the field and community service as well.

Usually, the combined teams volunteer at Christmas for the Toys for Tots program, operated by the LaGrange Lions Club.

"We want to give back (to the community) because they do so much for us," said Jim Piazza, Wildcat head softball varsity coach.

The softball teams also have raised funds for breast cancer research/awareness, a cystic fibrosis organization and a scholarship in memory of a former classmate.

While both teams took a trip to Kentucky over spring break in April to play softball, the girls stopped at Seasons Retirement Community in Cincinnati where they visited the residents where they spent a better part of their day visiting with the residents.

According to junior varsity softball coach Gary Kincannon, the girls played catch with and socialized with the residents from midafternoon into the evening.

"Both the girls and the residents became attached to each other and are still communicating," Kincannon said.

Piazza said Larry Radel, who is in his 90s, set his walker aside and picked up a ball and glove to play catch with the girls.

"He (Larry Radel) told the girls that was the best day of his life," Piazza said.

Piazza said to watch the interaction between the girls and the elderly residents was amazing.

"It was one of the best experiences, hands down. No one wanted to leave," Piazza said of the trip.

Varsity softball pitcher and first-base player Bee Shaw, 17,



PHOTOS PROVIDED BY GARY KINCANNON

Keystone High School junior varsity and varsity softball teams traveled to Kentucky over their spring break in April. While enroute, the teams stopped at Seasons Retirement Community in Cincinnati where they visited the residents. The team formed a special bond with resident Larry Radel, center, who was a 1940s softball pitcher.

described the experience as "wonderful."

"Coach 'P' wanted us to interact with the residents. Larry (the resident) wanted to be with us and be as active as he could. He played (sports) when he was younger and he is still involved," Bee said.

Bee said that before the teams left for the day, all the girls signed a softball and gave it to Radel.

After they returned to school, each girl received a letter from Radel. Bee said Radel told each girl how much the day meant to him.

Bee said the softball teams sang happy birthday to another resident. "We got there in mid-afternoon. We ate dinner with them and left around 7 p.m.," Bee said.

Varsity infielder Alisha Silva, 17, echoed her teammate's sentiment.

"I thought it was incredible. I wasn't expecting it to be so

emotional. It wasn't an everyday feeling," Alisha said.

"It showed me how much playing catch can mean to someone," Alisha said. "I had a hard time leaving. I wanted to stay there the whole trip. I loved hearing their stories."

Alisha said visiting the residents at Seasons Retirement Community showed her how important it is to connect with people of all ages.

"You don't have to play a sport to help others. You can do something on your own. When I went to (Seasons Retirement Community), I wasn't expecting to cry, but I had tears of joy (leaving)," Alisha said.

According to Seasons Retirement Community director of dining services Russ Conrad, who is a 1989 KHS graduate, it was hard to put into words the effect the girls' softball team had on the residents.

"Larry Radel was just overwhelmed. In the 1940s, he was

a pitcher for a softball team, so the sport is near and dear to his heart," Conrad said.

Conrad added that the residents who met the girls still want to know how the team is doing, so often he logs onto The Chronicle-Telegram's website to report the Wildcat scores.

"The folks here feel like they adopted the team," Conrad said.

Kincannon said the great part about coaching is seeing the students outside of the classroom.

"I was personally touched at how they bonded and responded to the residents at the assisted living residence," Kincannon said. "People read the paper and perhaps think that this is 'just a good softball team.' In the real world, they are great kids who will be outstanding citizens and are proving that with the personal sacrifices they make toward athletics and in the community."