



Sawtooth Ceramics Class Helps Stroke Victim Recover

By Judie Holcomb-Pack

Last fall 83-year-old Nannette Gatti moved to Winston-Salem to live with her youngest daughter. Seeing her move around today, it's hard to believe that in 2003 she spent over a month in the hospital, recovering from a series of strokes where she had to learn to walk and talk all over again. Recovering from a stroke takes "patience, hard work, and determination," according to Nannette. She was determined to resume living a full and active life.

Nannette and her late husband Rico led an interesting life, living all over the United States. She met her husband while they were both in school at the University of Southern Mississippi. He became a civil engineer and she became a physical education teacher and coached basketball, softball and boys' soccer, and taught history and literature. His job took them from Louisiana to Mississippi, Florida, Wisconsin and Illinois, and also outside the United States to Germany. An avid sports fan, she became a fan of the local teams where they lived and still cheers on the Green Bay Packers, Chicago Bears, the Broncos, and New Orleans Saints.

Always being an active, outgoing person, when she moved to Winston-Salem she started looking for something to do during the day while her daughter worked. She joined the YMCA and started working out with weights and walking. She was happy to find so many other seniors at the Y and easily made new friends.

Nannette embraced technology and learned how to use an iPad. She now has weekly "face time" with her sisters, aged 82 to 94, using the Face Time app to have regular chats. "It's almost like being together," she said with a big smile on her face.

Because she had a talent for art, her daughter suggested she check out the classes at Sawtooth School for Visual Art. She used to oil paint clothing when she lived in Florida, but holding a brush steady was difficult for her now. Nannette was drawn to the

ceramics program because she thought that working with her hands would help improve her dexterity, which had been affected by the strokes. After just a few classes, she knew she had found her place! She loves the feel of a raw piece of clay in her hands, and commented, "It's so satisfying to create something new."

For people who don't have a lot of strength or flexibility in their hands, working in ceramics is a good place to begin. There is equipment to help you roll out the clay and several talented instructors such as Nicole Uzzell are there to help you each step of the way. Since beginning the class, Nannette has completed two bowls, two angels, a pitcher and a mug.

Nannette has learned first-hand how Sawtooth provides opportunities for individuals to develop not only their creative skills, but also to develop personal relationships with others. According to Sawtooth Sales & Marketing Director Kevin Mundy, many ceramics students return every quarter to take classes because they develop strong friendships and enjoy the camaraderie. "Every time I walk down to the ceramics studio, the students are eating cake," Mundy said. "These folks really get to know each other well, and they celebrate birthdays and other special events. A few weeks ago someone brought in red velvet cupcakes for Valentine's Day," he said. "They're not only creative potters, they're pretty creative bakers as well!"

Nannette has found Winston-Salem to be a "true Southern town." She enjoys the new friends she's making and the many activities that are available here. Her enthusiasm and positive attitude are infectious.

Her advice to other seniors is, "Don't feel sorry for yourself - get going!"

If you're not sure about signing up for a class, Sawtooth offers "A Taste of Art," an evening where you can sample different types of arts and crafts. For more information, go to www.sawtooth.org and click on "Classes" and "Taste of Art."



Sawtooth School for Visual Art is working with Certified Brain Injury Specialist (CBIS) Robin Embry to conduct a series of classes in the coming months for her clients from the Carolina Center for Cognitive Rehabilitation. Embry, who is also an accomplished potter and ceramics instructor, founded this Winston-Salem based non-profit organization to help individuals who have experienced a brain injury as a result of a stroke, an accident or any other cause. Working with clay helps these individuals improve motor skills and cognitive processing, and provides a positive, encouraging environment for social interaction. For more information, contact Sawtooth at 336-723-7395.