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Grand Pal letters

Hats off to the "Grand Pals" program that's been an extra friend to local school students.

Illona Aleman, second-grade teacher at Akron Public Schools' Pfeiffer Elementary, couldn't be happier with the program. Its participants were recently saluted at a luncheon.

"For the past seven years Mature Services Inc. — under the direction of Inese Alvarez — has found mature citizens [through its Retired Senior Volunteer Program] in our community who were willing to exchange letters with my second graders," wrote Aleman.

"Once a month we prepare a response to the individual who wrote to us. We use AlphaSmart [machines] to type the letters. Students are excited to participate in technology. The keyboard allows us freedom to elaborate without concern over handwriting skills."

Aleman said the students are encouraged to tell a little about themselves. "When the response letters come back everyone gleams with joy over having a letter addressed to them, asking them more about their shared topics," Aleman continued.

"At the end of the year we receive gifts like school supplies, books, handmade bookbags and a pizza party where we actually get to meet our Grand Pal."

According to Alvarez, the Grand Pals program currently operates in Pam Fetchu's sixth-grade class at Green Intermediate School.

The Corporation for National and Community Service and the Akron Community Foundation have been a funding source for Mature Services' Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP); RSVP volunteer coordinator is Vera Hurst.

Interested in learning more about Grand Pals? Please call RSVP at 330-253-4597, Ext. 166 or 169.

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