

Music therapy helps nursing home residents

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[View full size](#) DAN GLEITER, The Patriot-News AI Glover, a

resident at Bethany Village Oaks Skilled Nursing in Lower Allen Twp., uses a Beamz interactive music system to create music by pushing his hands through six laser triggers. For Glover, playing the Beamz helps his range of motion and it also bridges the generations with his 8-year-old granddaughter who visits him at the nursing home. "Grandpappy wasn't supposed to make music like that!" the 84-year-old former church choir member said. "She never saw anything like it."

When she hears the strains of the Glenn Miller Orchestra begin, Carolyn McMillen is a high school senior again in the arms of her boyfriend at the Valencia Ballroom in York. Her eyes shine brightly and a wide smile spreads over her wrinkled face.

No matter that it is now decades later; the music has transported the 89-year-old Bethany Village resident back to a time of warm memories and youth.

"My boyfriend invited me to go see Glenn Miller. Oh, it was so exciting!" said McMillen, who grew up in Gettysburg. "We stood in the front of the orchestra and listened, and then we danced to all his songs."

Those songs are now part of McMillen's personal playlist on her iPod, thanks to a music therapy program at Oaks Skilled Nursing at Bethany Village in Lower Allen Twp.

"There are all sorts of studies in regard to how music affects the brain. People associate music emotionally with different events in their lives. We remember all the faces and the emotions we were having when that song was

originally played,” said Susan Crossley, director of rehabilitation at Oaks Skilled Nursing. “It seems innate after your memory has started to fade.”

Indeed studies have shown that music is linked to areas of the brain that control memory, emotions and movement, according to the American Music Therapy Association.

First introduced in 1950, [music therapy](#) is increasingly being used to help nursing home residents cope with the grief that comes with losing much of their independence and physical strength as well as to improve memory, movement and calm.

“We know that when people engage in music, the brain changes for the better and we also know that music is stored all over the brain and so even when one area of the brain is injured, we can still access it through another area,” said Ann Dinsmore, supervisor of music therapy at the Masonic Village in Elizabethtown, where residents sing, move and play instruments.

“If we can tap into the right music at the right time, provided in the right way, we can communicate,” she said. “For many older residents, it’s with live music. They gathered around the piano every Sunday afternoon to sing and that was an important recreation.”

Research shows that we engage best with music we enjoyed from age 15 to 30, which is the time of life associated with major events such as education, marriage and parenthood, said Dinsmore, one of three board certified music therapists at the Masonic Village.

Increasingly, research studies are showing what board certified music therapists have seen anecdotally for years: Music is helpful in a wide range of ailments.

For people with Parkinson’s disease or movement disorders, making or listening to music can improve gait, balance, range of motion and coordination, Dinsmore said. For people with dementia or Alzheimer’s disease, music can unlock memories and improve communication.

“Sometimes people are not able to speak, but they can sing every word of a song. If they are able to get those consonants and vowels out, they can relearn speech without the melody,” she said.

Music can lessen perception of pain, ease anxiety and promote relaxation and sleep, she said.

Bethany Village recently earned a research grant to look at the positive effects of individualized music therapy for long-term care residents, awarded by the Music and Memory Foundation and the Institute for Music and Neurologic Function in New York.



[View full size](#) DAN GLEITER, The Patriot-News Susan Crossley, director of recreation at Bethany Village Oaks

Skilled Nursing in Lower Allen Twp., helps resident Geri Nadler set up her iPod. Nadler likes to follow the escapades of "The Green Hornet."

Since introducing the iPods to residents last fall, Crossley said staff has seen a decrease in anti-anxiety medications needed by some residents and a decrease in agitated behavior, which has translated into a calmer atmosphere on the floor.

"It took hours to sit one on one with each resident to find out what songs they wanted on their playlist — sometimes it meant playing 15 second snippets of songs — but it was all worth it for the wonderful reaction it has gotten," she said.

With her iPod, Bethany Village resident Geri Nadler, 82, can once again follow the escapades of "The Green Hornet," a newspaper publisher by day, vigilante crime fighter by night.

"For Sunday night supper, we would have lunch meat — it was expensive and you couldn't get it very easily during the war — and sit around the radio to listen to 'The Green Hornet,'" said Nadler, recalling her teenage years. "As I look back on it now, it was really propoganda, but my sister and I loved it."

Crossley's interest in music therapy began when she started a drumming circle with residents and saw the joy it brought them.

"Music unites people like no language can," she said. "It gives them a sense of community because everyone is participating together."

Crossley also introduced residents to [Beamz](#), a computerized interactive music manipulation system that works with laser beams. Six laser triggers and two button-controlled triggers activate up to 64 independently controlled sequences of musical notes. Residents can choose a genre of music and insert different instrumental

accompaniments by pushing their hands through the beams.

For Al Glover, playing the Beamz helps his range of motion and it also bridges the generations with his 8-year-old granddaughter who comes to visit him at the nursing home.

"Grandpappy wasn't supposed to make music like that!" the 84-year-old former church choir member said. "She never saw anything like it."

Monaghan Twp. piano teacher Della Cosey knows well the positive impact that music can have on dementia patients at Messiah Village in Upper Allen Twp., where she takes her students to play.

"While some residents are seemingly oblivious to our being there, others are visibly engaged with our music through a tap of the hand or a foot to the beat. There are even those who swing their arms in beat, clap their hands or dance in their seats. Usually these are the people who were very connected to music in their past," she said.

"It's amazing to see a person who can communicate very little verbally still sit at a piano and play music they've learned in the past. To participate in music uses many different areas of the brain. Although one area is ravaged by disease, other areas take over and make playing the piano possible."

Whether making music or just listening, the effects are undeniable, said Linda Grobman, a music practitioner certified by the Music for Healing and Transition Program. She plays live [therapeutic flute music](#) at the bedside of residents at the Jewish Home of Greater Harrisburg and those served by Compassionate Care Hospice.

"Music has been shown to lower blood pressure, anxiety, respiration rates and have calming physical effects," she said, noting that therapeutic music is different than music therapy in that it does not usually include participation of the patient. "It's a very human connection to have someone come in and play beautiful music."

Written by CAROLYN KIMMEL For The Patriot-News

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