

# NEIGHBORS

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## Stroke victim learns through volunteering

By **MARIE WILSON** | Contributor

A small, dimly lit room at the Countryside Association for People with Disabilities near Palatine is the workspace of nine pre-vocational clients, adults living with severe mental and physical disabilities and the motor skills of a 3- or 4-year-old.

Three days a week, Ed Penar of Lake Zurich spends time in that same dark room as a volunteer, interacting with the clients by helping them create watercolor paintings and other artwork.

Penar, 80, began working with the Countryside Association's disabled clients at a time when his skill level was about equal to theirs. In July 2005, Penar suffered a stroke which caused him to lose what he called "everything," including spelling and speaking abilities.

After his stroke, Penar's doctor recommended that he take an art class to help him re-learn colors and the words associated with them.

Penar's watercolor teacher at the Foglia YMCA in Lake Zurich suggested the Countryside Association as a place where Penar could practice his skills and help out at the same time.

"As I learned, I was able to teach," Penar said. "And teaching others is the easiest way to learn."

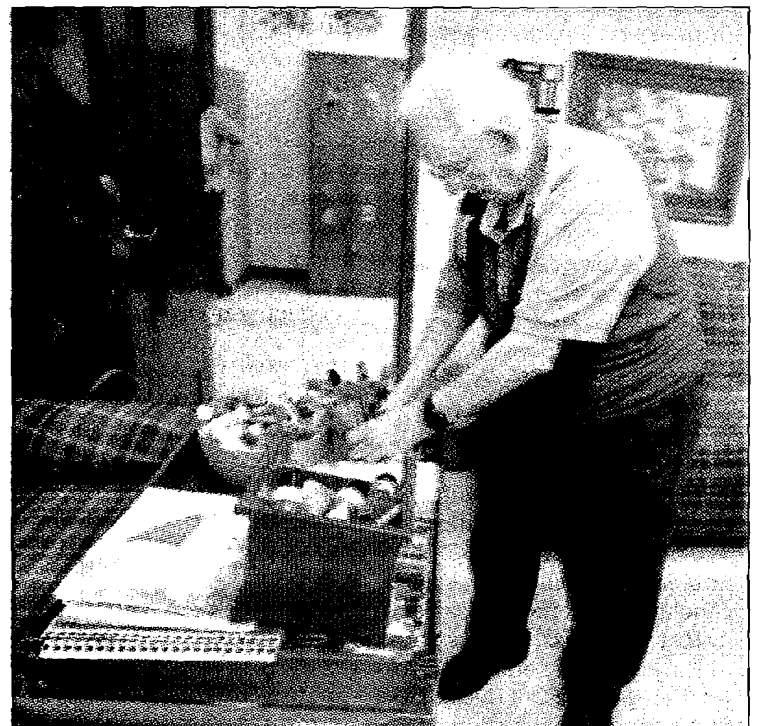
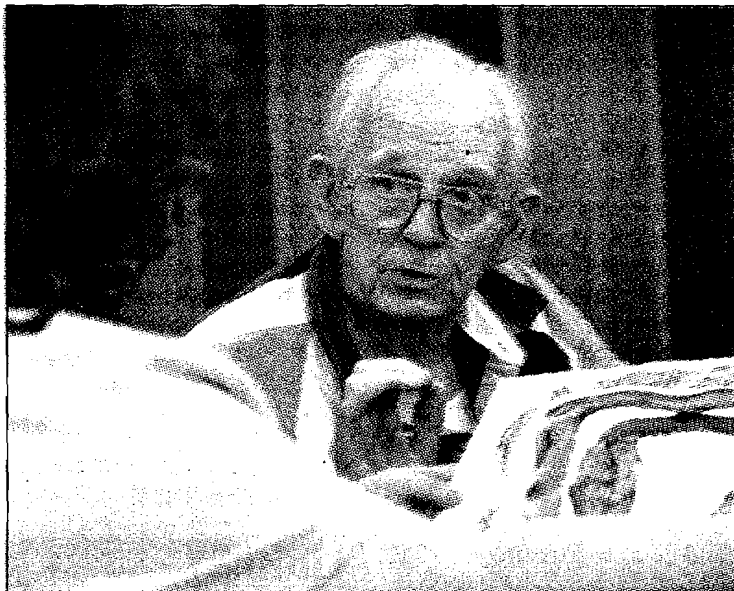
Penar assisted clients at the Countryside Association as they completed watercolor paintings for a display called Art in the Countryside, which showcased clients' art in June.

Maureen Almazan, program specialist, said Penar taught clients the complexities of watercolor painting, including the correct way to hold a paintbrush, and how to create effects by using different amounts of water.

"I've never done this (watercolors) before in my life, but it's fun," Penar said.

Among the more than 30 clients Penar has worked with, he said he particularly enjoys working with the pre-vocational group, including a blind woman named Mary.

"It's amazing what she's done for a person who's 100 percent blind," Penar said. "I would tell her to draw a tree, and she would repeat it three



(Top) Countryside Association volunteer Ed Penar (right) paints with client Kelly Smith at the Palatine location.

(Above left) Countryside Association volunteer Ed Penar (right) of Lake Zurich paints with client Kelly Smith of Wauconda.

(Bottom left) A painting by Countryside Association client Kelly Smith.

(Above) Countryside Association volunteer Ed Penar puts away paint supplies at the Palatine location.

Photos by Buzz Orr/Staff Photographer

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"It doesn't have anything to do with personal," she said. "He's the one who ran someone against me for state rep. Every time I've run for re-election, he's the one who has identified people to run against me."

Moore said that if the two square off in

these years and that's basically what I've run for," Moore said. "I still have a lot of good friends and acquaintances in Cook County that will be supporting me, as well as in the religious community."

Joe Berrios, the chairman of the Democratic Party, wouldn't take a position on the Moore-Yarbrough feud.

# STROKE

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times: 'We need a tree, we need a tree, we need a tree,' she would say and then 'OK.' I would guide where she should go and then she would paint it."

Besides teaching his newfound talent of watercolor painting, Penar also helps a client named Wayne by teaching him magic tricks, a hobby Penar practiced prior to his stroke while visiting nursing homes with St. John's Lutheran Church in Chicago.

"Ed has a soft spot for Wayne," Almazan said. "He works on problem solving and how to use his hands, not for the magic, but to teach him how to be a mechanic and use tools through magic."

Other volunteers at the Countryside Association also use their skills to teach clients. Volunteers staff a mini market which functions as a cafeteria, teaching clients about money by selling them snacks and lunch foods.

Individual volunteers also read to clients and help with special events such as the Art in the Countryside show, and the second annual talent show, scheduled for Oct. 3.

Kelly Rentas, special events and public relations administrator, said clients enrolled in any of the association's programs, including work and developmental training and supported employment programs, can participate in the special shows.

Executive Director Wayne Kulick said the programming division of the Countryside Association focuses on client self-expression.

"We give people the opportunity to express themselves, and in terms of individual expression, art is one way," Kulick said. "We know them as employees, but they also have other gifts that we try to let them share. The most important message is that these people with disabilities have lots of abilities, and we try to get them to express themselves in any way they can."

As the Countryside Association, which serves residents throughout the northwest suburbs, promotes self-expression to its clients, the clients that Penar works with also helped him regain the power of communication after his stroke.

"They know how to talk, so they helped me learn words," Penar said. "I lost 100 percent of my talking, and you can't make a mistake with these handi-caps. When you make a mistake, they don't judge you."

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