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Good Gould girls live for community service

Marissa Brooks



Lara Gould (left) and Kim visit Kenneth Baker at Sardis Oaks Nursing Home. Photo courtesy of Kim and Lara Gould

Providence Day School rising seniors Kim and Lara Gould, both 17, started volunteering at Sardis Oaks Nursing Home three years ago, when they were assigned there for a Hebrew High School service project. They dressed as clowns, sang and handed out balloons to residents.

"Some volunteers don't show up, but Kim and Lara do," said Sardis Oaks resident Ken Baker.

Balloons and smiles were all it took for Baker to fall in love with the girls.

"They are very nice, outgoing young ladies," said Baker. "We love them here."

The sisters receive no school credit for their regular visits to Sardis Oaks. They visit the residents and call bingo twice a month because they love their time there.

Baker, 68, has developed "quite a rapport" with Kim and Lara and can even tell the identical twins apart. He often waits for them in his wheelchair by the front door when he sees "Gould Girls" written on the calendar of events.

Kim and Lara's eyes light up and their voices become animated when speaking about the nursing home residents. They seek out Connie Rich, 81, at every visit to make sure that she comes to bingo. They admire her rhinestone belts and share stories.

"They are absolutely marvelous," said Rich. "I really appreciate when young women their age volunteer. They come in and bring such love and caring with them."

Rich once gave them heart stickers and said she was pleased that the girls keep the stickers on the backs of their cell phones. Rich was thrilled to share the girls' prom pictures with other residents as if they were her own grandchildren.

The Gould girls live for community service.

"Helping others is a family motto," said Kim. The two live near the Arboretum with their parents, who encourage and inspire them and their two college-age brothers to be "menschen" (Yiddish for "good people"). Even their collie mix, Gus, is a certified therapy dog.

"We like helping people," said Lara. "It's actually rewarding, and it makes you feel really good just knowing that you made even the smallest difference."

"It feels so good to share a part of yourself with other people and know that, by doing that, you make them happy," said Kim.

There is no sense of sibling rivalry; in fact, the reverse is true. "We definitely inspire each other," said Kim. "When we see the different community service activities each other is involved in, it serves as a reminder of what good role models we are for each other and how we can continue to help each other to give back."

Kim and Lara maintain good grades and are also actively involved in Providence Day's service clubs: Keyettes and Beta Club. They volunteer at a soup kitchen, Rama Road Elementary and the YWCA. They are president and vice president of Club Shalom, a secular club that promotes peace.

Early one Saturday morning, they cleaned out "invasive species" and other weeds at their school and called it "really fun." Kim recently returned from a Providence Day volunteer program at a Peruvian orphanage.

The Gould girls' other passion is fashion. They volunteer once a month on the Nordstrom BP Fashion Board, discuss new trends and give their opinions on fashions.

The girls are not just generous with their time.

"For their birthday presents to each other, they contributed to the Madrichim (assistant teacher) program," said Temple Beth El Religious School Director Susan Jacobs. The girls "volunteer way beyond their teenage years," Jacobs said.

They exhibit Jewish values of compassion and caring about the world around them, and they want to make a difference.

When asked how they fit volunteering into their academic and social lives, Kim and Lara said, "time management."

Marissa Brooks is a freelance writer who lives in the Arboretum area. Have a story idea for Marissa? E-mail her at mbrookspt@earthlink.net.

Read more: <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2010/08/04/1591622/good-gould-girls-live-for-community.html#ixzz0v14ixvGu>