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Lily Ellis, 16, of Peoria gives Bel-Wood Nursing Home resident Arlene Darling, 83, a hug after helping make her a painted tile for her room's ceiling on Saturday. Area teens joined exchange students from Friedrichshafen, Germany, Peoria's sister city, in a community service project. The exchange students are visiting Peoria for a few weeks and staying with host families.

German teens create art at Bel-Wood

Students from Peoria's sister city work with nursing home residents as part of exchange program



RON JOHNSON/JOURNAL STAR

German exchange student Lisa Müller works on painting a tile for resident Betty Hauck at Bel-Wood Nursing Home on Saturday. The tiles will be displayed at Bel-Wood.

BY PATRICK OLDENDORF
OF THE JOURNAL STAR

PEORIA — Twenty teens came all the way from Germany to visit with Bel-Wood Nursing Home residents Saturday morning.

The residents of Peoria's German sister city of Friedrichshafen were at Bel-Wood to work with the seniors on an art project.

Through an exchange program, students from Friedrichshafen visit every other year for a few weeks to get a taste of American life and culture.

"We try to find service projects for them to do while they're here, too," said Theresa Hoadley, who supervises the American side of the program with her husband, Eric. "When they were here two years ago, we did exterior work ... at the Family House, so we were looking for another good project for this year."

Each student was paired up with a Bel-Wood resident to paint a ceiling tile together. Once completed, the tiles were

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VIDEO REPORT: See footage from Saturday's event at Bel-Wood Nursing Home at pjstar.com.

Want to become a host family?

Friends of Friedrichshafen is always looking for new host families to assist with its student exchange programs. For more information, send e-mail to hoadleys@comcast.net or call 266-6820.

hung in the halls of Bel-Wood and in the rooms of residents who are bedridden.

And when the new Bel-Wood facility is completed in 2011, the residents who painted the tiles will be able to bring them along in the move to have something to remember their old facility and new German friends by.

"I love painting. I do it at home all the time, so it's fun," said Lisa Müller, 18, who is from

Friedrichshafen. "This is my first time (in America), and I think it's very nice here. I hope to come back someday."

During the summers the German students aren't in Peoria, a group of about 20 Peoria-area youths head to Friedrichshafen for a similar experience.

"Our main premise is to promote knowledge about different cultures," Hoadley said. "We're teaching peace through our kids."

The exchange program is called Friends of Friedrichshafen, which is billed as the oldest youth exchange program in the United States. The first exchange was in 1976.

When the youths visit the different countries they stay with a volunteer host family, where they are treated as one of the family's children. Families sending children overseas are responsible only for airfare and passport fees. The host families do not charge for room or board.

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