



Wilma Hoffman of Newington

Granting Wishes, Teaching Knitting = Bringing Joy

They are an unlikely pair – the 75-year-old grandmother of four and the wild-haired teenage boy who's had trouble in school – but there they are, huddled over a ball of yarn and a pair of knitting needles during a meeting of the Knitting Club at New Visions Alternative School, which is for students who have been expelled from other Hartford schools.

"These students are fragile both emotionally and behaviorally," says Wilma Hoffman, the club's founder and volunteer director. "They benefit immensely from the therapeutic, meditative aspect of knitting."

And likely from Wilma's kind, patient, and enthusiastic instruction – and a passion for teaching that sustained her through her 40+-year career as a special ed teacher in the Hartford public school system, which culminated at Bulkeley High School.

In her volunteer teaching role at New Visions, "I have high school boys and girls making headbands, scarves, and fingerless gloves and loving it," she says with a twinkle in her eye. Using donated yarn and needles, the students become remarkably prolific knitters once they get the hang of it – and Wilma encourages them to donate some of their "extra" handmade items to the South Park Inn homeless shelter.

You'll see that twinkle again if you ask Wilma about the Make-a-Wish Foundation of CT, where she has volunteered for 35 years as a wish-granter for children with life-threatening illnesses: "I always love to see that smile on the wish child's face when they tell their desired wish and know that this special time will come true for them and their families."

The pandemic turned this veteran educator into a student again, as Wilma figured out how to shop for groceries online and to use Zoom to teach knitting and fleece blanket-making – this time with children and adults through the Hartford Public Library and the Charter Oak Cultural Center.

Says her nominator: "Like so many 'Wonder Women,' Wilma Hoffman didn't let retirement mean the end of a career; instead, it was the beginning of a new chapter of her life in which she is teaching troubled kids more than just knitting – she's teaching them how to cope with frustration and to feel good about their ability to create something beautiful that helps someone else."