

## The gift of music in Valparaiso

By Brian Williams Times Correspondent | Wednesday, June 1, 2011

VALPARAISO | Most of the tunes are from the 1920s to 1940s -- the music many of these seniors grew up with.

But when the strains of "Hey Jude" spread across the Pines Village Retirement Communities dining room one recent evening, 82-year-old Nancy Stoltz looked up and waved to the piano player.

And the piano player waved back.

"I'm supposed to wave," Stoltz said, explaining the secret signal. "She has done

me a big favor. She has played Beatles music. I'm a Beatles fan from way back."

The player is Sharon Costas, whose Pines Village gig is just one of several volunteer efforts across the city through which she shares her musical talents. Costas plays weekly both in the main Pines Village dining room and on the assisted-living side. She also plays at Rittenhouse Senior Living, the Visiting Nurse Association's hospice center and her church.

Although the older songs are recent additions to her repertoire, they're not new to her listeners.

"These people have all lived through the Great Depression," Costas said. "All the positive music that came out of the Depression is amazing. When you'd think they'd be singing gloom and doom, they're singing 'Blue skies, smiling at me, nothing but blue skies do I see.' ... I enjoy being a part of that."

The idea to play dinner music came to Costas, wife of Valparaiso Mayor Jon Costas, during the opening reception for Pines Village's extensive 2010 renovation. A longtime pianist, she had recently started jazz piano lessons and thought she could contribute by sharing her new talents.

"I've met so many great people," Costas said. "They look forward to it, and I'd better not be a no-show without a good reason."

The music brightens spirits and even makes the meals taste better, residents said.

"It's like going to an elegant restaurant," Ruth Foster said.

Costas recalled tears on the face of resident Irene Malasto during one rendition of the World War II-era favorite "I'll Be Seeing You." For Irene and her late husband Art, it had been "their song."

"It's so wonderful that she contributes her time," Malasto said. "It brings back so many memories."

Resident Mary Ann Smith said she often puts in requests and is never out of luck for long.

"If she doesn't know it," Smith said, "she comes back the next week and says, 'I know it now.'"

For Costas, the power of music is hard to explain.

"You can hear three notes of a song and it can make you cry," she said. "Music is just powerful. It's something we all connect with. Can you imagine our lives without it? I mean, how dreary. ... I'm just blessed to be able to do what I do and share it with people."



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