

## Home away from home

BY STACY CHANDLER - Staff writer

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A blank canvas is full of possibility, but a blank wall in a hospital room doesn't offer much in the way of inspiration.

Emma Astrike-Davis learned this lesson when she visited her great-grandmother in a nursing home a few years ago.

"When we went to visit her, a lot of her friends' rooms we noticed were kind of bare," said Emma, 15, of Durham. "We tried to keep her room decorated very nicely, but some of her friends didn't have as many relatives around them as she did, and so I thought it would be a nice idea to try to brighten up their rooms."

At the same time, she was looking for a service project to lead for her school, and Art for Hospice was born.

The nonprofit buys canvases and gives them to area schools that pass them along to students in art classes to paint. When completed, the canvases are returned to Art for Hospice and then given to local hospices, Veterans Affairs hospitals and nursing homes to help brighten the walls for patients.

The students, who usually work in groups, can paint whatever they want. Emma just asks that it be "bright and cheery."

"It doesn't have to be super high-quality art," she said, "just stuff that would make people happy."

Having cheerful artwork around is helpful to residents of the institutions to which Art for Hospice donates, but it's good for the artists, too.

"It also gives people my age a chance to learn about these terminal illnesses and debilitating conditions that people are living with and it gets them involved with that kind of stuff," Emma said.

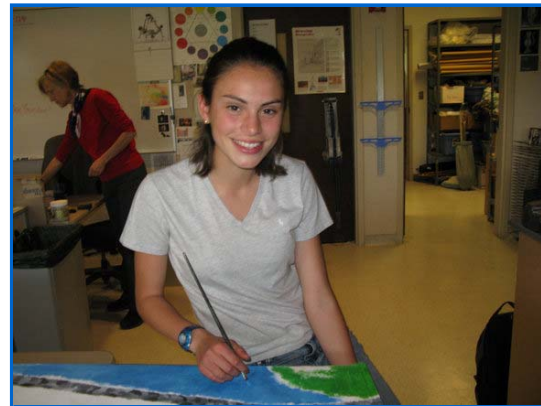
She knows firsthand the benefits of bridging that gap.

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To learn more about Art for Hospice and to see a gallery of donated artwork, go to [www.artforhospice.org](http://www.artforhospice.org).

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Inspired by visits to her great-grandmother, Emma Astrike-Davis started Art for Hospice to brighten up rooms and make residents feel more at home.

"I got a lot closer to my great-grandmother when I was visiting her and got to hear all her stories," she said. "It's amazing the times these people have lived through and the stories they have to tell about them."

But the greatest reward for all her hard work - like coordinating delivery of artwork, applying for grants and putting together fundraisers for money to buy canvases - is the reaction she hears about from the artworks' recipients.

"People have cried" when receiving some artwork for an otherwise bare room, Emma said.

Most touching, she said, was a report of a man at a VA hospital who was given a collage with a patriotic theme.

"The people at the VA said that he sat with it in his lap for the last day of his life," Emma said. "It just made it all worth it to me."

Not surprisingly, Emma herself finds that art has a way of reducing stress in the life of a busy high-school student who just happens to also lead a nonprofit organization.

"I think it's really calming and relaxing," she said of painting when she gets the chance at her school, Cary Academy. "When everything else is getting really busy, I know I can just go to Art Club and paint."

But at the end of the day, no matter how stressful, she gets to go home, a privilege she knows some older folks don't have.

"I just know with my great-grandma that she missed her house a lot ... and I believe that a lot people feel like that," she said. "So anything that I can do to make it more homey for them and more bright and cheerful I think is great."

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