

Proposed growth tool would likely reduce residential development



Workers are nearing completion on the new Winterpock Elementary School. Even though Winterpock and another elementary school in Bermuda District will open this winter, over 200 schools are expected for many years to come.

Wish list approved with 13 new schools

# SENIORS



## Walk & Roll makes it more fun to get around



Lisa Billings/Chesterfield Observer

Rich Babbitt installs Walk & Roll balls on a walker for a resident at Elmcroft Assisted Living.

By Sande Snead  
 CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Like many people who watch someone else invent something that was right in front of their face all the time, Elmcroft Assisted Living resident director LuAnn Paul could kick – or maybe more appropriately throw a tennis ball – at herself.

During her 20 years of experience in long-term care, Paul had watched people at the assisted living center affix tennis balls to the legs of their walkers to help them get around more easily.

But it was the son-in-law of an Elmcroft resident who discovered a way to make the tennis balls more fun. Rich Babbitt, creator of “Walk & Roll”™ “Tennis Balls...with attitude!”™ came up with the idea to draw faces on the tennis balls after his mother-in-law asked for the makeshift-gliding devices when the rubber wore off of the bottom of her walker’s legs.

“I found some old, dirty tennis balls in the garage, and cut them to fit, but I thought, isn’t it funny that there is nowhere to buy pre-cut tennis balls for walkers?”

He drew faces on the balls just to make them more fun. When fellow residents saw his mother-in-law’s smiling tennis balls, the novelty caught on at Elmcroft.

Now, he’s enlisting marketing students at Midlothian High School to help him promote his creation. Babbitt is partnering with teacher Beverly Dodge and her Advanced Marketing class to give students a real world taste of how to promote a product. Twice a week, senior students receive a hands-on marketing lesson from guest speakers including a patent lawyer, a promotional printer and an accountant. The students have also photographed and designed a brochure featuring the Walk & Roll™ tennis balls.

“I’ve been talking to the class for about three months, and they’ve come along on the marketing ride,” Babbitt said. With the students’ help, the balls are currently being sold at Buford Road Pharmacy in

Chesterfield and Westbury Pharmacy in Henrico County.

“They are already really selling well,” said Cindi Johnson, Buford Road Pharmacy marketing director. “Our owners are talking to owners of other pharmacies about forming a partnership. The tennis balls serve a purpose. It’s not just a tennis ball. It’s something to talk about.”



Lisa Billings/Chesterfield Observer

Cindi Johnson shows the novelty tennis balls to Elmcroft residents.

Johnson said the tennis balls give people on walkers a smooth glide, particularly on linoleum and similar surfaces. They wear better and last longer than the rubber grips on walkers, she said.

Buford Pharmacy and Midlothian students donated some Walk & Roll™ balls to Elmcroft in early December.

“The residents love them. One of our residents is always so dolled up, so her tennis balls have big lips and big eyelashes. It’s like they were designed for her,” said Paul.

Tennis ball characters include Sunny, Wink, Happy, Girley and Smiley. The balls are a hit at Elmcroft, with about 60 residents sporting them on their walkers so far. The center gave out a couple for Bingo prizes, and they were hot commodities.

“It’s such a simple idea, and with all the years I’ve done this, I wonder how come I never thought of it!” said Paul.

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1. Audited Sept./Oct. 2007  
 2. Virginia Press Association 2008 directory. The newspaper is owned by Media General, parent company of the Richmond Times-Dispatch.  
 3. Virginia Press Association 2008 directory. Unaudited.  
 4. Editor of Style Weekly, Oct. 2007.

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