



Toni L. Bailey / The Chronicle

James Hersch takes the outstretched hand of Liberty Country Place resident Aldric Lizotte Thursday during a community outreach program sponsored by Centralia College Student Programs. Hersch shared stories with residents and sang songs that made them tap their feet and sing along.

Performer reaches out to young, old

CONCERT: *Minnesota musician plays for schools, nursing homes through national outreach program*

By Mai Ling Slaughter

The Chronicle

Whether they tapped their toes, sang the tunes, or simply listened, the residents at Liberty Country Place shone like stars Thursday afternoon.

Faces of the south Centralia retirement home's elderly residents — many in wheelchairs — suddenly lit up as classical guitarist James Hersch sang tunes many may have grown up loving.

Even with 20 people in the audience, Hersch found a song or a smile for each of those listening.

"He's doggone good," said Sadie Vanquaethem, who remembers hearing Hersch perform on previous visits to the nursing home.

A music performer from Minnesota, Hersch performs at schools and nursing homes nationally through the REACH program he founded five years ago.

"These things can go in all directions," Hersch said of his perfor-

mances. "Sometimes they end up goofy parties."

Sponsored by Centralia College, Hersch performed at one of its day care centers and at Liberty Country Place. He was scheduled for a noon performance today at Cascade Elementary School in Chehalis.

"We love bringing James instead of just having an event," said Candy Layman, coordinator of Student Activities at the college.

REACH encourages colleges to find a connection with other parts of the community through the sponsorship. This is the third year Hersch has performed at Liberty Country Place through the college.

"I'm just here to sing a few songs with you, and a few songs for you that you probably aren't going to know," Hersch began his set, wielding a well-used guitar.

He sang funny songs, songs he had written, songs with which some sang along, and songs with which some cried.

Vanquaethem, born in 1902 and with a story for every occasion, kept Hersch after his performance to share her experiences with him as he diligently listened.

"We're awfully glad you came,"

she said shortly before Hersch left. "Thank you very much for listening."

The two swapped family stories throughout Hersch's performance, once driving Hersch to take a break from a song for a quick conversation about his 12-year-old daughter.

"Maybe next time you can bring your family," Vanquaethem suggested.

Hersch is married and also has a 9-year-old son.

Next month, Hersch will perform in Tacoma at the National Association Campus Activities event where the college originally came across his program.

Participants of Student Activities attend the conference to find lecturers, musicians and other performers they believe would be a positive addition to the community.

"I think we'd like to do more (music)," said Director of Student Programs Shelley Bannish, "but it's just hard to get people there."

Information about REACH may be obtained on Hersch's web site: www.reachwithme.com.

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