Program for handicapped schoolchildren scores

Kids make Mr. Mac’s retirement years golden

By Vern Putney

Retired phone worker George R. McGrory would brush aside mention that he must have a hot line to Heaven, but he’ll beam affectionately when one of his golf pupils happily shouts, “Look, Mr. Mac!” after a good shot.

The North Palm Beach, Fla., resident has seen his weekly teaching program for handicapped kids mushroom from one grade school and nine students in September 1988, to eight schools and nearly 500 boys and girls.

Said McGrory: “We have seen tremendous changes in their outlook on life, school work and attitude toward other persons. They are aware that they can do some things with their lives and bodies once believed out of reach. They recognize that ‘somebody cares.’”

That particular somebody is McGrory, who stashed his electronic equipment in his native Rhode Island a few years ago and made tracks for Florida and “the good golf life” in what Palm Beach County claims is the “Golf Capital of the World.”

He found a better way to spend his “golden years.” The world of the handicapped was awaiting a kind man with a warm heart. “Mr. Mac’s Kids” are those with learning disabilities, cystic fibrosis, multiple sclerosis and other crippling diseases.

Barbara Blank, a teacher at Grove Elementary School in Palm Beach, planted the program idea in McGrory’s mind.

How might she provide her autistic students something besides reading, writing and arithmetic? she inquired of McGrory.

McGrory suggested golf. A program was launched the next week. McGrory dug into his pocket to provide clubs, tees and balls.

Youngsters’ handicaps range from learning and language disabilities, those wheelchair-bound and paralyzed from the waist down, to the mentally retarded.

They share a love for “Mr. Mac” and appreciation of volunteers he’s met.

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Among the students who once believed disease and drought were their fate are potash and dwarfing grasses, and who was attending stead of three-hole golf course for handicapped children, she said, “The best for me is to help George attain his goal of a three-hole golf course for these special youngsters,” she said, and, if I can, through my contacts across the country, scrounge old clubs that can be cut down for use, fine.”

Meantime, McGrory will continue to apply his never-ending devotion to a great cause. Sure, at 64 he and wife Alice could be relaxing at the 19th hole of some club, sipping a cool one and savoring the so-called finer things.

Instead, they spend most Sunday afternoons washing clubs and golf balls at the kitchen sink as he prepares for the week’s instructional programs.

At Christmas time, the recipients of McGrory’s generosity have a grateful hug for their year-round Santa and his unsung helpers.

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— George McGrory

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