

They Really Care About the Planet; Green Ideas Have No Age Limit at South Tulsa Retirement Village

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By John Klein, Tulsa World

A news story about a dead whale inspired Rita Shisler, 96, to lead a movement to spread reusable bags among her friends.

Ray Bachlor, 92, has a weekly “think tank” with fellow Zarrow Pointe residents that spurred an idea to add solar panels to covered parking.

Green initiatives to help heal the environment are often associated with young adults.

Bachlor and Shisler, along with the more than 200 residents of Zarrow Pointe, a retirement village in south Tulsa, prove there is no age limit for loving the earth. “It is sort of like throwing out seed on the ground,” said Bachlor. “You may not see what grows from the seed. Some of it may not grow for years.

“But, you have planted the seed and you know that eventually it will grow.”

Shisler and Bachlor have been leaders in efforts at Zarrow Pointe to live lives that enrich the environment.

“It all came from our residents,” said Jim Jakobovitz, CEO of Zarrow Pointe. “This is not an idea that came from management. This was something they decided they wanted to do.

“There is an old Jewish saying that literally means to repair the world and leave it in better condition than the way you found it. Our residents have taken on the responsibility to do what they can to make sure they help leave the environment in better condition.”

Zarrow Pointe’s efforts may be small in the overall health of the planet, “but it is a start,” said Bachlor. “These are things that everyone can do. We have a group of about 20 that live out here that meet occasionally and we talk about world affairs and all sorts of things. “We leave the politics out of it. We talk about ways to make things better in the world and that includes the environment.”

Bachlor’s group came up with the idea to add solar panels to about 24 parking spaces at Zarrow Pointe. The setup includes two car chargers and generates about 100 kilowatt-hours per day.

It is the largest solar-cell parking facility in the state, more than double the size of the next largest (at the Cherokee Nation headquarters in Tahlequah).

“Not only is it great for the environment but it helps us to be more self-sufficient when it comes to electric,” said Bachlor. “Sure, we have limitations. There are financial concerns. But, when we approached management about it, we were maybe expecting a negative response. Instead they were very receptive.”

Bachlor said his group is also discussing the possibility of getting several electric vehicles that could be used for taking residents on errands such as shopping or to medical appointments.

“Jim and the management here has been great because they have been very open to our ideas,” said Bachlor. “We want to give back and they’ve helped us make some of our ideas a reality.”

Shisler got involved after reading about a dead whale that was found with a “belly full of plastic bags,” she said. “I just didn’t think that should happen. So, I decided to do something about it.”

She started out by getting a reusable cloth shopping bag.

“That was a small thing but it was something I could do,” she said.

But she didn’t stop there. On weekly trips to the grocery store, in a Zarrow Pointe van, Shisler started encouraging others to switch to reusable bags.

“It was an idea that was spreading but I felt we could do more,” said Shisler.

So, she organized an effort to get reusable cloth bags for any Zarrow Pointe resident who wanted one.

Walmart donated 240 reusable cloth bags to Zarrow Pointe residents.

“When I first started doing it, I was the only one on the van going to the grocery store that had a cloth bag,” said Shisler. “Now, everyone that wants one can get one. I’m so happy.

“Hearing about the whale just made me aware of what harm plastic can do to the environment. So, it started with one person and I talked someone else into it. Then, we got another person. Pretty soon everyone was asking where they could get a reusable cloth bag.”

The efforts of the residents also spurred an interest in Zarrow Pointe management to become more environmentally aware. Zarrow Pointe has enacted recycling programs in partnership with American Waste Control Inc. In addition, it is looking for ways to go to more environmentally friendly paper products for to-go food orders.

Plus, they are looking to expand the solar carport project with a partnership with Francis Renewable Energy.

“It is very inspiring to see how involved our residents have become,” said Jakubovitz. “They have been coming up with ideas and then finding solutions to make them a reality. I think it is one of the many things that makes this a special place. They really care about the planet.”