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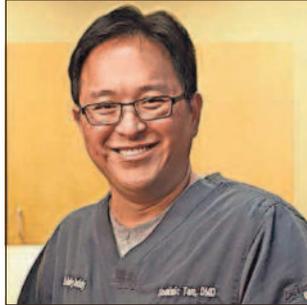
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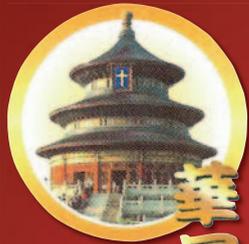
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Volunteering leads to an unexpected friendship

Janelle Tapphorn

Special to Arizona Republic
USA TODAY NETWORK

April is National Volunteer Month, a time when non-profits often celebrate and show their appreciation for the volunteers who make their services possible.

For many, one of the intangible benefits of volunteering can be when an unexpected yet life-changing connection is made.

Barbara Bess is a homebound adult who receives volunteer services through Duet: Partners In Health and Aging.

Her matched volunteer is fellow Phoenix resident Jeff Riddle. For three years, the two have been lifting each other up with good-natured humor and laughter.

"Whatever Jeff does, he does it from his heart, and that's important to me in a volunteer," Bess says.

When Bess was in need of someone to drive her to pick up her medications and groceries, she reached out to Duet for help. She was connected with Riddle, and the friendship that resulted was unexpected.

"We clicked right off the bat," Riddle says.

Bess quickly adds, "He's always there for me on time and willing to help; they couldn't have paired me with a better person."

Forged out of necessity, their partnership is much more profound.

"She's one of my best friends," Riddle says. "We talk about a lot of things, everything from our families and dating to our pasts and our faith."

Riddle moved from Philadelphia to Arizona several years ago to pursue his education, leaving his close-knit family behind. Bess has become like a surrogate parent to him, keeping him accountable to his schoolwork.

"She's like a mom to me, always asking, 'How did your test go or did you get your paper done yet?'" Riddle says. "She's just so joyful all the time and brings out the laughter in me. We just laugh non-stop!"



Barbara Bess and Jeff Riddle became friends after Riddle began volunteering to help Bess go to the store to pick up medicine. FRANKIE

WHEELER

Riddle has always thrived in an environment of volunteerism.

As a child in Philadelphia, his family was always quick to help in their neighborhood, made up of mostly elderly tenants. It has carried over to his adult aspirations as evidenced by his current pursuit of a master's degree in social work specializing in the aging community.

"I enjoy this population a lot, and thanks to my work with Duet, I've developed an appreciation for the richness of our senior community. I don't see myself working with any other group," he explains.

When he's not in school or assisting Bess, Riddle interns with the crisis response unit of the Fire Department.

"You know, it's really powerful when you can help someone out," he says.

To anyone considering volunteering to help one of Duet's neighbors needing assistance, Riddle says, "Jump in (to volunteer) because you'll never, ever regret it, and you'll get just as much joy out of it because you're not just giving but you're receiving so much in return."

Duet has a waiting list of nearly 50 homebound adults in need of volunteers for rides to the grocery store and medical appointments. The non-profit hosts monthly volunteer orientations. To learn more, call 602-274-5022 or email volunteer@duetaz.org.

Janelle Tapphorn is the communications intern at Duet and a freelance writer.