

# MSM students create coloring book for memory loss

By **PATRICK J. BUECHI**  
STAFF REPORTER

Three students at Mount St. Mary Academy have used their talents to help those afflicted with Alzheimer's. They created a cognitive coloring book to help draw back memories. Actually, they created more than a product. They created an entire business.

The students, part of MSM's Academy Scholar program developed their book, "Forget Me Not," as a way to honor family members struggling with the disease that robs people of their memories and causes disruptions in their thinking and behavior.

"When I started to develop this idea, I definitely wanted to do something with Alzheimer's, I just didn't know what," explained Clarice Scarpace, a senior at the Kenmore high school. "Through my research I discovered that there wasn't a whole lot of coloring therapy for Alzheimer's patients. The ones that were (available) weren't ideal for the patients. They were either too detailed or they weren't using the correct colors that would kind of upset the patients or would confuse them."

Coloring pictures has proven to reduce stress, give the patient a sense of accomplishment, and allows them an independent activity that doesn't require supervision. The book also has connect the dots puzzles, word searches and journal questions, all developed by the girls over the past three years.

"In research we found that drawings that were too detailed or patterns that were too advanced that you see with most coloring therapy books out there, it can kind of confuse them a little bit, as well as bright colors, bright pinks, bright oranges, bright red. In the book we looked at, that's what we saw. So we said we don't want to do anything like that," explained Scarpace, who serves as CEO for her company. "When I explain Alzheimer's to people, I explain it in a way that your brain is



DAN CAPPELLAZZO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Mount St. Mary's seniors Amelia Waddell, Clarice Scarpace, and Amanda Ackley worked for three years to produce an adult coloring book for people with Alzheimer's.

kind of going backwards. So, instead of learning things, you're losing that part of your brain. In order for patients to be able to use this book effectively they had to be simple enough so they could understand what is going on in the picture, but not too simple as to be demeaning. Because there aren't that many cognitive coloring books out there for these patients, a lot of times people

will hand them coloring books for children. That would really make the patient feel like they are not where they use to be in life, and that can weigh on a patient emotionally."

Mount St. Mary's Academy Scholars program gives students opportunities for entrepreneurship. SAGE and Virtual Enterprises allow students to create businesses for competitions. The Entrepreneurship program allows students to start a small profit or non-profit business that they run themselves. Students get a 40-minute class period every other day to work on product development and business strategy.

"We spend that time working on developing our product, figuring out marketing, whatever it is that can further the progress of the book," said Scarpace.

When chief marketing officer Amelia Waddell joined the project

in her freshman year, she thought designing and producing the book would take a few months.

"That did not happen," she said. "The first year was mostly research, figuring out what we were going to draw, and then putting the book together. Last year was mostly connecting to the Alzheimer's Association, finding the right printer."

The girls spent their summer working on layout and printing, trying to make every aspect perfect. The hard work has paid off. The Alzheimer's Association was very excited to see the project. They offered some suggestions to make the wording of the journals more open and offered their Longest Day logo. The book will be presented at the Longest Day fund-raising event Dec. 21.

The Alzheimer's Association reports that 5.7 million Americans are living with the disease. The three executives behind Forget Me Not have family members who have lost precious memories, which served as a motivating factor.

"My great grandma passed in March. She didn't get to see (Forget Me Not), but she knew what was happening and she was excited about it," said Waddell.

Amanda Ackley, chief operating officer, visits her great aunt once a month with her mother and grandmother. She plans to bring the book on their next visit. She hears Aunt Daisy tell made up stories of her nonexistent days in the circus. Her mother and grandmother try to bring her back to reality by reminding her of real things she has done. Ackley hopes the book brings back real memories of everyday things like cooking pasta sauce on Sundays.

Now in the marketing stage, the team is developing a website and will be talking to hospitals and care centers to get the book in the gift shops. The book can be ordered from forgetmenot@msmacademy.org for \$8 a copy. They plan on continuing the printing, with profits going to the Alzheimer's Association.

*There aren't that many cognitive coloring books out there.*

~ Clarice Scarpace