

Boston Neighborhoods



DAVID HATCH

David Hatch, a resident at The Boston Home, an assisted living home for people with neurological disabilities, photographed the scene at left because, "It looked like a picture just waiting to be taken."

DORCHESTER

Home offers rooms With a digital view

Cameras help residents remain independent

By **Andreae Downs**
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

As an intensive-care nurse at Massachusetts General Hospital, Eleanor Kasilowicz, did not have time to develop hobbies like digital photography.

"I was just too busy," she said.

But as she has become increasingly debilitated by multiple sclerosis, a progressive neurological disease, Kasilowicz has learned new skills at The Boston Home, a nonprofit long-term care facility in Dorchester. The Boston Home cares for people in the later stages of MS and other such disabilities generally afflicting the young the average age at the home is 53 that while disabling the body, leave the mind clear.

"Photography has opened my eyes to a whole new world," Kasilowicz said. "It has given me a goal. I may be physically disabled, but my mind is still very active."

Despite being hindered outside the home by curb cuts and doors unsuited for her 4-foot-wide motorized wheelchair, Kasilowicz makes the most of the MBTA's The Ride, which provides lift-equipped vans to transport people who cannot use general public transportation to shop and get around. Last summer, with the help of a summer intern at the home, she took a trip to Castle Island to photograph places she remembered as a child.

According to Boston Home chief executive officer Marva Serotkin, the institution works hard to get residents the technology they need to remain as independent as possible.

Kasilowicz's chair is a case in point; each chair is adapted to fit the current needs of its resident, with adaptive equipment ranging from a joystick to voice-operated controls. The home's techno-wizard, Don Fredette, is in charge of creating and repairing each "Frankenchair" and other adaptive technology. He also equipped each camera with a steadying, adjustable arm and individualized triggers for taking pictures.

Colleen Powers, another resident, said, "I can once again capture the calm and steady photos I want. Holding anything straight with multiple sclerosis is a real challenge."

Kasilowicz, Powers, and about 10 other residents learned to operate digital cameras this spring. Volunteers from the Citizen Schools' 8th Grade Academy, an after-school program based in Codman Square that draws from nine Boston middle schools, joined them on several consecutive Saturdays to take and download pictures.

Serotkin dreamed up the photography program and applied for a state Department of Public Health empowerment grant. The funds come from fines levied on nursing homes that are not meeting DPH requirements. The final part of that grant fully adapted digital video cameras is almost ready, too.



GEORGE RIZER/GLOBE STAFF

David Hatch, a former computer systems engineer from Framingham, is, like Powers and Kasilowicz, still snapping photos whenever he has an able-bodied volunteer who can help with adjusting the camera's adaptive equipment. In many cases, this is Hatch's grandson Will, 14, who joined the Citizen Schools children last spring and still drops in to help his grandfather and others at the home with their photography.

Powers, who once repaired her own VWs and ran a 24-hour auto-race team that competed against the likes of Paul Newman, used her camera to take pictures of the home's gardens.

She has also been enlisted to record the home's award ceremonies and hopes to publish the resulting pictures in the residents' newspaper, due out soon.

Kasilowicz said the camera also "opened up a new avenue for talking with people."

She said her extra-large chair often draws curious children, but with the camera, those too shy to talk about her disability are able to engage about photography.

To volunteer to help with photography or otherwise at The Boston Home, call Sally Gorman at 617-326-4298.