



Youth in Arizona took a blast to the past with a memorable service project.

Time machines have been dreamed up in all shapes and sizes. Such fantastical devices have been represented on screen and in books as everything from hyped-up supercars to phone booths.

For a large group of youth from Arizona, USA, their blast to the past took place inside their local stake center.

Connecting Generations

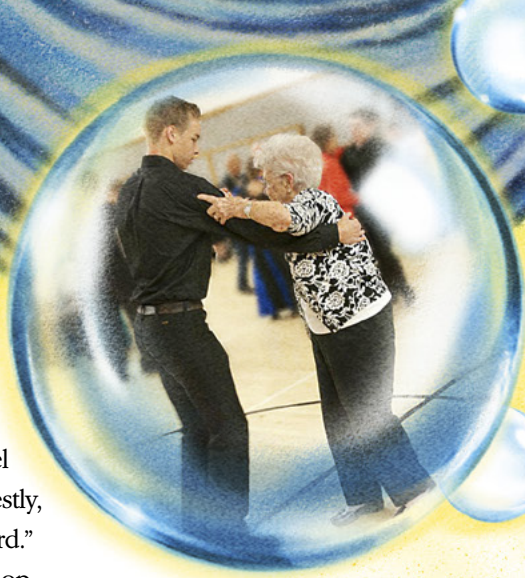
This particular journey began after President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, told youth, “You may wonder, at my age what I can contribute to your lives. I have been where you are and know where you are going. But you have not yet been where I am” (“Counsel to Youth,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2011, 16). These words prompted leaders in one stake to start thinking about ways to help youth connect with elderly people in their area.

As youth and leaders began planning, they decided to put together a program in the spirit of *The Lawrence Welk Show*, a popular American TV show featuring music and dancing that ran from the 1950s through the 1970s. This was a show many of the seniors in the stake knew and loved well.

Most of the youth, however, had never heard of it, and at first some of them didn't know quite what to think of the idea.

THE Stake Center TIME MACHINE

By David Dickson
Church Magazines



“I was unsure,” says Lisette L., a Laurel from the stake. Adds Slade C., 15, “Honestly, I thought it was going to be kind of weird.”

After all, we’re talking about barbershop quartet music, dance styles from decades past, and the hope to form close friendships across wide generation gaps. Still, the youth jumped in with both feet and started preparing.

“We wanted the youth and the elderly citizens to get to know each other,” says Pam Nielson, one of the leaders. “We wanted them to realize they have a lot in common.”

Practice, Practice, Practice

This wasn’t an activity that could be thrown together in a few days. Preparation involved weeks of rehearsals. There was an all-youth orchestra, an all-youth barbershop chorus, an all-youth band, and all-youth dance teams who learned songs and routines from the 1920s through the 1960s. That takes time to create. “These kids were amazing,” says Pam.

For their part, Slade and Lisette were both chosen as part of an advanced dancing team. “There were lots of rehearsals,” Slade says. “After Mutual, we went down to the stake center and practiced.”

As the show began coming together, the excitement grew. “It was really fun,” says Lisette. “For most of us, it was our first time hearing any of this kind of music.”

Unexpected Friends

When the big day arrived, the surprise highlight—for many—took place before the first note of music even rang in the air.

The activity was scheduled in two segments. For the first part, the 200 youth from the stake were divided into groups of four, and then each group was assigned to visit an elderly man or woman in his or her home for an hour and a half.

“That was definitely one of my favorite parts,” says Slade. He wasn’t alone, either. For many of the young men and young women, these get-to-know-you sessions were fascinating as well as inspiring.

Slade’s group was assigned to visit Hazel Cameron, a widow in their stake who lived through the Great Depression. “I never guessed at all the things she’s been through,” Slade explains. “She told us a few stories that I thought were pretty exciting.”

Slade and the others in his group spent 90 minutes getting to know Hazel, asking her questions about her life. They all enjoyed one another’s company—and none of them minded a bit when Hazel shared a few treats she’d made. It turns out baking cookies and making candy is one of her favorite hobbies!



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ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROGER MOTZKUS; PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF KEATON ALLEN

LEARNING FROM CONFERENCE

Elder Hugo E. Martinez of the Seventy said in the October 2014 general conference: “The love of Jesus Christ must be our guide if we are to become aware of the needs of those we can help in some way. The teachings of our Lord, Jesus Christ, show us the way. And that is how our personal ministry begins: discovering needs, then tending to them” (“Our Personal Ministries,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2014, 102; read it at lds.org/go/personal4NE).

Understanding someone’s needs often begins by getting to know them. Consider setting a goal to learn one thing you didn’t know about 10 different people. You might discover you have more in common than you guessed! And the things you learn about those you talk with will help you know how better to serve them.



Another of Hazel’s favorite hobbies is dancing, including the fox-trot. “She taught me a few moves,” Slade says.

At the end of their time together, the elderly members in each group shared a few words of advice with the youth. These messages were recorded and later compiled and handed out as treasured DVDs.

Showtime!

When visiting time was over, the youth said good-bye to their new friends and got ready for the performance later that night. They could hardly wait to put on the performance.

After all the hard work, *The Lawrence Wright Show* was ready to begin. The event was named for the stake president, Lawrence Wright, who played the role of host Lawrence Welk, complete with a flurry of bubbles like they had in the original show.

The youth went all-out in performing for their new friends. All night long, the stake center became a time machine as song after song turned back the years for the guests of honor. “I loved seeing how happy they were as we performed for them and brought back memories,” says Lisette.


After the grand finale—a song and dance routine to the traditional closing song from *The Lawrence Welk Show*—music continued, and the youth invited their friends from the

audience to join them for more dancing. “It was super exciting,” says Slade, who shared a dance with Hazel.

A Change of Hearts

The friendships formed that day have lasted well past the show’s closing curtain. The youth enjoy seeing their new friends at church and around town. Slade, for example, drops by Hazel’s house now and again just to say hello. He often thinks of ways to brighten her day. “I didn’t think this activity was going to be amazing, but it was,” Slade explains.

Pam hears all the time from senior members in the stake who tell her how the youth will come up and talk with them at church. “They truly made friends,” she says.



This activity ended up providing much more than entertainment. By getting to know those they served, the youth formed friendships they never knew they were missing. “No matter what age we are,” says Lisette, “we’re all part of the same family.”^{NE}

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