

Pint-sized volunteer fills a big role at Liberty Commons

By Merrily Lunsford

Good things really do come in small packages. That's not hard to see when 3-year-old Emily Aucoin walks into Liberty Commons.

For the past 10 months, Emily and her mother, Michelle, have volunteered their time at the Chatham-based rehabilitation and skilled care center.

"She just brings an aliveness to them," said Alzheimer's unit coordinator Drury Schnaible of the pint-sized volunteer. "They look forward to her visits. She just lightens up their lives. She's better than Santa Claus."

The duo initially visited the center to see a family friend but after watching how the residents' faces lit up when Emily walked in, the two started to go regularly.

"I've been looking for intergenerational volunteers," Schnaible said, noting the center's medical director, Jean-Paul Aucoin, is also Emily's grandfather. "It works out well."

"She brings a life to them," said mom.

Her daughter, she said, enjoys her time with the residents and goes home and talks about her time with them.

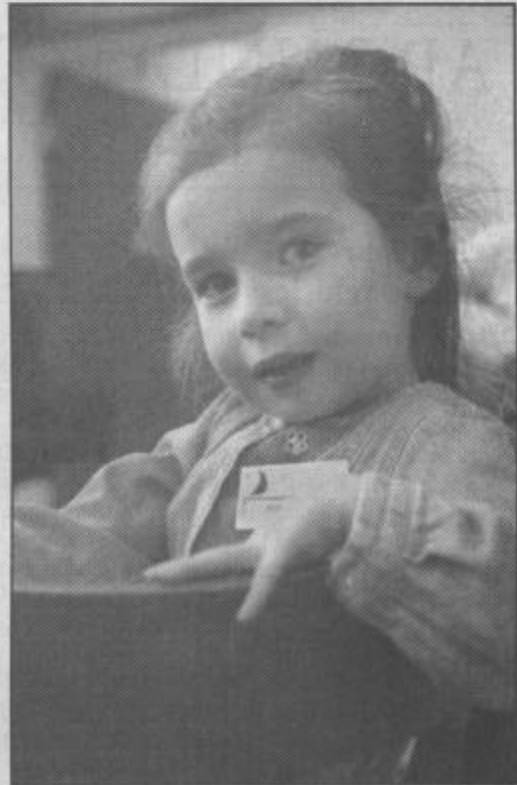
"She loves it," she said. "She has 50 grandmothers."

*"She just
lightens up
their lives.*

*She's
better
than
Santa
Claus."*

— Drury
Schnaible

Ready to serve:
Emily Aucoin
surveys the dining
room looking for those
without napkins.



Emily Aucoin has been a volunteer at Liberty Commons for the past 10 months.

Staff photos by Merrily Lunsford

Emily and her mother visit the center two to three times a week.

On Wednesday, Emily, donning her official volunteer name tag, entertained those residents during the monthly birthday party.

"She's so cute," one woman said as Emily passed out napkins to cake-eating residents.

On other days, Emily helps to fill the bird feeders, delivers mail and even sings and dances for the residents. She also brought in her dog for the residents. "It's a lab," she said.

Emily is also good with one-on-one sensory stimulation, Schnaible said. This personal attention is something that the center's staff and therapists already do, Schnaible explained, but Emily's attention brings a special sparkle to the residents.

"She does her own brand," Schnaible said. "She's just great."