

Blooming Creativity: Seniors Build Ceramic Garden Tower

Made in community, crafted in clay — a Lyngblomsten summer creation.



It began with a curiosity earlier this spring from Holly Nelson, Lyngblomsten's Director of Lifelong Learning and the Arts:

"Our courtyard is going to be completely dug up and redone this summer. I'm wondering if we can work on a ceramic tower project for the residents?"

Flash forward a few months, and you see several residents sitting outside in the new courtyard while teaching artist Julian Gruber, along with Holly and Alisa of Lyngblomsten, work together to find the perfect placement for the hand-built ceramic pieces of the tower.

Northern Clay Center (NCC) has been

partnering with Lyngblomsten Care Center for over 14 years. Every Monday afternoon for three months this summer, a group of thirteen residents — all but one over the age of 85 — met and handbuilt ceramic pieces for a courtyard garden tower. The projects included a variety of ceramic beads, flowers, petals, a raindrop, and the logo of Lyngblomsten — the letter "L" and the national flower of Norway, the Calluna, also known as ling.

Research shows that those involved in weekly participatory arts programming experience better health and emotional well-being, maintain more of their independence as they age, participate more actively in their community, and experience greater joy in their lives. As the weeks went by, some residents chose

to collaborate on the group project — the ceramic garden tower — while others preferred to continue working on individual pieces and exploring new techniques. Julian met each participant where they were, and residents were free to let their imaginations run wild and create what they desired.

Alisa, Activity Coordinator at Lyngblomsten, reflected that over the summer, residents grew more confident, proud of themselves and began to take more creative risks.

One resident shared that she had never seen a ceramic garden tower before and had no idea how it would look. Once the projects were glazed, Julian brought all of the creations to a meeting



where the group collectively came up with a plan for placing the pieces. They even numbered everything to simplify installation.

We gathered the following week for the installation — and quickly learned that our detailed planning wasn't going to help after all. The pole cemented into the ground was thicker than expected, which meant not all of the pieces would fit. Still, everyone showed adaptability and expressed joy as they strung the pieces together.

There were lots of "It looks good," "Oh, I like that," and laughter—especially when the group decided that, of course, the Lyngblomsten logo needed a hat on top. Why not! One resident even shared the project with her children, who were amazed and couldn't believe what she was creating in class.

In these uncertain times, the power of art and community in the aging population

continues to shine — reminding us that art is essential. Teaching artist Julian put it best:

"Working with the Lyngblomsten residents was a joy. I truly appreciate the lived experiences of older adults. While we worked toward our garden installation, I loved seeing folks bring their unique contributions to a group project. By offering a bit of ourselves and our efforts to the collective, we strengthen the bonds within our communities—not just through art installations. Together we can build more beautiful and better things."

Grant dollars are just one of the things we rely on to bring these programs to life. The other is you — our NCC community. To keep programs like these running, please consider donating to our Outreach programming, becoming an NCC member, attending our events, or booking a private party.

If you're interested in organizing a program like this, please send an inquiry to our Community Engagement Manager, Julia Rodman, at juliarodman@northernclaycenter.org or call **651-339-8007 ext. 313**. We look forward to hearing from you!

Images, opposite page, from left: Handbuilding participants working on their projects during class. Mary Thoenke, a Lyngblomsten resident, paints a ceramic bead.

This page: Some of the Lyngblomsten residents and Julian with their completed garden tower