



## The Republican.

### Beetlebop bridges generations

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By MELISSA KATZ Photos by BOB STERN With hands in the air and little lips mouthing the words to songs they don't quite know yet, a small group of youngsters gathers at the Rockridge Retirement Community in Northampton each week to sing along with their elders.

The songs are old favorites, and many invite theatrical hand movements that everyone seems to enjoy: "Itsy Bitsy Spider," "Row, Row, Row Your Boat," "Ring Around the Rosie," "Wheels on the Bus" and the "Hokey Pokey."

The free weekly music and movement group for young children, known as Beetlebop, meets at 10:30 a.m. every Wednesday at Rockridge. Preschool age children and their families are welcome to attend, and refreshments are provided. Beetlebop is one of the most popular programs offered to residents of the retirement community.

"The intergenerational component is what draws people," says Julie Wysk, the recreational therapist for Rockridge. "It's bridging a gap. Most of the residents have great-grandchildren who live in other parts of the country, so they don't get to see them that much. It's filling a need and filling a gap."

That's true for the parents who bring their little ones, too.

Rachel Achmad of Easthampton brought her twin girls, Abby and Amelia, 22 months old, because, she says, "Both my girls are really into music."

Her daughters don't have any grandparents living locally. "They've never been around anyone over around 55 or 60," she said. "So this is great."

Beetlebop was started seven years ago by a group of new mothers who were searching for a place that would allow their toddlers to move around freely during a group music class, according to Amanda Merullo of Williamsburg, who was one of the founding mothers. Another mother began calling around and eventually contacted Wysk, who said she was thrilled to welcome such a program to Rockridge.

"I was excited from the beginning," Wysk said. "It's kind of an original program. It takes quite a commitment from the moms. They have been faithfully coming every Wednesday, even through holidays."

Wysk notes that no reservations are required, and children do not need to sign up or commit to any number of weeks. The program generally lasts 30 to 45 minutes.

Though the program is intended for preschool-age children, older siblings are also welcome to attend. There are generally about 10 to 15 residents who attend, along with roughly half a dozen children and their parents.

"This brings out the child lovers, the residents who seek out any opportunity to be with children," Wysk said.

When the program concludes, the tiny singers go around the circle to shake hands with residents, then sit down to a snack of juice and cookies.

Rockridge resident Charlie Tudryn, 85, says he enjoys sitting back to take in the music and marvel at the children's energy and carefree movements. "I remember these songs," he said. "I just love kids."

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