

Barbara, Lenny and the Hudson Stompers bring music and laughter to seniors

By John Koning

People seem to come in two types. There are those who enjoy being entertained and those who enjoy entertaining others.

Barbara and Lenny Proietto are two of the latter.

When you combine that desire with their genuine love for humanity you get a plethora of good works.

The Proiettos' values might be considered old fashioned in today's narcissistic world, but they are truly modern people. They, like an increasing number of folks, met online. To Barbara and Lenny, it made perfect sense and, to use Lenny's words:

"It allowed us to easily find someone who shared the same values."

Barbara was hesitant about the introductory coffee date with Lenny until her granddaughter agreed to accompany her.

Lenny, on the other hand, wasn't so sure about a meeting that included what he thought was a pesky little grandchild. When Barbara clued him in about her 40-year-old chaperone, he agreed to meet.

The first rendezvous went so well that more followed and they were married less than a year later. They have been going strong ever since.

The compatibility that Barbara and Lenny share comes from their mutual desire to love and serve others, and the two guiding forces in their lives – a local group of entertainers called the Hudson Stompers and their church, The Salvation Army.

Barbara was the first to be enlisted by the Hudson Stompers through her line dancing instructor about a year before she met Lenny.

Once she met and married Lenny, it made perfect sense for him to join the group as their master of ceremonies, comedian and mime artist. It is a job that requires an outgoing personality and an ability to work under pressure when the ladies' elaborate costume changes get hung up, so to speak.

On one occasion, not long ago, Lenny was left scrambling for comedy material on stage when his six-minute routine needed to be stretched into 20 long minutes. Thankfully a 94-year-



Getting to Know You

A monthly feature about the people in your
On Top of the World community

by John Koning

old audience member from Brooklyn gave Lenny some much needed audience participation. Lenny, a Brooklyn boy himself, engaged the fellow and included him in his extended routine.

A potentially disastrous delay became the highlight of one lonely senior's week.

Meanwhile, life back in the Hudson Stompers' dressing room is best described as chaos, with up to 19 ladies, ranging in age from 64 to 91, undressing and re-dressing during Lenny's standup routines. It is a well choreographed mad scramble of unzipping, zipping and getting zipped.

Meanwhile, on stage, Lenny is per-

fectly at ease while winging it in an outrageous Elvis costume or a floral skirt and coconut bra.

Of course, Barbara is equally comfortable in any of her many colorful and flamboyant costumes. She has even been spotted in a poncho and sombrero, shaking her maracas like there's no tomorrow.

Barbara, Lenny and the rest of the Hudson Stompers average a half dozen shows a month in nursing homes and churches in Pinellas County. They don't ask for a cent in return, and they pay for all their own gas – something that impacts the wallet more significantly these days than at any other

time in history.

Grateful recipients of their talent and energy will sometimes donate some cash. That money is documented and sent straight to the bottomless pit of costume expenses.

So why do these folks keep up the endless practices, the travel and the expense?

It's simple really. Lenny, Barbara and the rest of the Hudson Stompers feel like they get more out of each performance than they contribute.

They are regularly bathed in genuine gratitude, heart-felt comments, lingering handshakes and, on one awkward occasion, a 90-year-old boob flash. For the record, that last gesture of appreciation is not why they do this!

When the curtain comes down at the end of another performance, Barbara, Lenny and the rest of the Hudson Stompers can rest assured they have brought music, love and laughter to some of our most under-appreciated citizens.

The Proiettos' values might be considered old fashioned in today's narcissistic world, but they are truly modern people. They, like an increasing number of folks, met online. To Barbara and Lenny, it made perfect sense.