

MAKING A DIFFERENCE: PAUL CARMICHAEL

BY KATHY CARRIER
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Point of impact: Nimbly working his fingers across the keyboard on his shiny accordion, Paul Carmichael, 52, brings back fond memories as he plays the tunes for the elderly in nursing homes, senior centers and retirement communities as part of the Senior Sing A-long program.

“It’s a gift God has given me,” Carmichael said, adding he has played the instrument since he was 4 years old. The son of missionary parents, Carmichael spent most of his youth in West Africa but learned to read music from an elderly music teacher as a child when his parents were on leave from mission work. The Grand Rapids man also plays the piano and organ.

On his own, he’s played for older people for years. He began volunteering for Senior Sing A-long about a year and a half ago. Besides playing the accordion, Carmichael weaves in inspirational thoughts, anecdotes and life lessons he hopes will encourage his audience.

What it is: Established two years ago by Ken and Hattie Van Haaf-ten, the nonprofit organization includes about 40 volunteers. “Some sing, some play an instrument, some dance, and some even have a comedy routine,” board member Jill Dover said.

With a mission to enhance the quality of life for individuals in nursing care, assisted living facili-

ties and hospitals. Senior Sing A-long strives to bring

smiles as it stirs wonderful memories through entertainment. The emphasis is to encourage participation. “It’s amazing, but when they hear the music, they begin to remember the words. We’ve even had some people get up and dance,” Dover said.

Why there? “Music seems to trigger something, and for some elderly people, it’s the only time they may come out of their room,” Carmichael said. “When I play, I can see a light return to their eyes, and they smile.”

For Carmichael, volunteering for Senior Sing A-long is more than performing. “I love older people, and over the years, I’ve seen a lot of older people who are very lonely and don’t have many visitors,” he said. Music has a way of brightening their day, lifting them up and giving them something positive to look forward to, he said.

If families are visiting loved ones during his performances, they enjoy the singalongs, too. “Music crosses the generations,” Carmichael said.

How often? Typically, Carmichael gives five to six performances a



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Singalong fun: Paul Carmichael plays and sings in Senior Sing A-long programs to brighten the lives of the elderly.

month for Senior Sing A-long.

Reason for volunteering: “Everyone has a different gift,” Carmichael said. “By sharing my music, it’s a way to share the wonderful gift that God has given me. This is my way to make a difference in people’s lives.”

What else does he do? Carmichael is a counselor at Mel Trotter Ministries and specializes in dealing with substance abuse.

Contact: To volunteer for Senior Sing A-long, call Jill Dover at 538-8590 or address mail to “Attention: Jill,” in care of Arbor Lake Apartments, 2967 Byron Center Ave. SW, Wyoming, MI 49509.