

Card Crusaders' ingenuity impresses Marsha Blackburn

Bonnie Burch, bburch@tennessean.com 5:57 p.m. CDT June 30, 2014



(Photo: Bonnie Burch / *The Tennessean*)

BRENTWOOD – The FiftyForward Martin Center's Card Crusaders, a group of women who hand-make iris paper folding greeting cards to help fund projects at the Brentwood senior activity center, got a visit from one of their biggest fans to date.

U.S. Rep. Marsha Blackburn, who also is a Brentwood resident, stopped by the center Monday to see just how the seniors produce the intricate cards, which include more than 80 designs ranging from wedding cakes and baby bottles to hippopotamuses and high-heeled shoes and dresses.

"This is absolutely amazing. They are just gorgeous. I'm going to use these to send special notes to special people," Blackburn said as Card Crusader Marilyn Nevens showed her the process involving colorful paper, scissors and tape.

Awhile back, Nevens took a red, white and blue elephant card and wrote a short note to Blackburn inviting her to check out the group. Friend of the center and Brentwood Mayor Betsy Crossley hand delivered the note to Blackburn at an event the two attended.

Last year, the Card Crusaders, which number 18 members, raised more than \$26,000 for Project Transportation, with a goal of securing a new 24-passenger van to take members to various outings. That was more than the \$4,500 needed for the purchase, with a state grant picking up the rest of the cost at \$45,123 for the minibus.

Card Crusader funds also have bought new ottomans for the center and a 72-inch television set, which they'll use to watch a "Tennessee Crossroads" segment detailing the group's efforts when it premieres in September.

And the card ladies' reach is expanding. Recently, the Hudson Group, a retailer that operates newsstands and bookstores in train stations and airports across the country, has made a first order for the cards to be sold at the Nashville International Airport, with plans for additional airport gift store space in the near future.

During the visit, Card Crusader members presented Blackburn with more cards to take home, including those with elephants, a Tennessee state flag and a red, white and blue bow tie. Blackburn's husband, Chuck, is the founder of the International Bow Tie Society.

Blackburn was impressed with the group's creativity and ingenuity in raising the needed funds. FiftyForward, a nonprofit organization serving adults 55 and older, operates seven centers in Middle Tennessee that feature classes, activities, events, trips and other projects.

"They saw an issue — they needed a van — that needed to be addressed, and they solved it themselves. I think if more people can do something to solve problems like they did, then we are well served," Blackburn said.

Reach Bonnie Burch at 615-771-5421 and on Twitter [@BonnieBurch_WAM](https://twitter.com/BonnieBurch_WAM).

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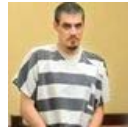


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