

Students Reach Out To Seniors Via Pen Pal Program



Reed Cooper and Jim Fahey were born generations apart, and their upbringings could not be more different. Fahey grew up on a farm in Ireland. Cooper is a Joel Barlow High School student from Easton.

Despite their differences, Fahey, 80, and Cooper, 15, write each other letters and mail them through the U.S Postal Service. They call each other between their mailed replies.

Fahey and Cooper's friendship developed through a Pen Pal program that began during the Coronavirus quarantine, but their relationship will likely endure.

"He's like the son I don't have," Fahey said of Cooper.

"I don't have intentions of stopping, it doesn't take much time to write a letter," Cooper said.

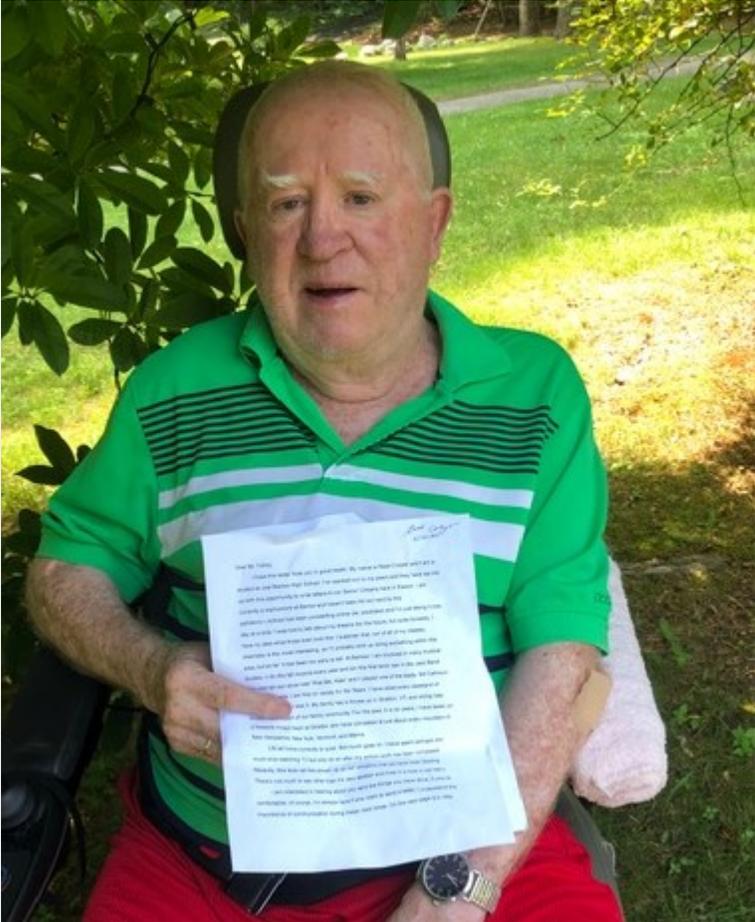
Susan Kaplan, Helen Keller Middle School principal, and Val Buckley, Easton Senior Center director, paired up in March to launch the Pen Pal program when the pandemic shut down the Easton Senior Center and cancelled the middle school's Seniors Day.

Joel Barlow High School students were matched with seniors through the efforts of Chloe Rozendaal, a Barlow student herself who volunteers at the senior center.

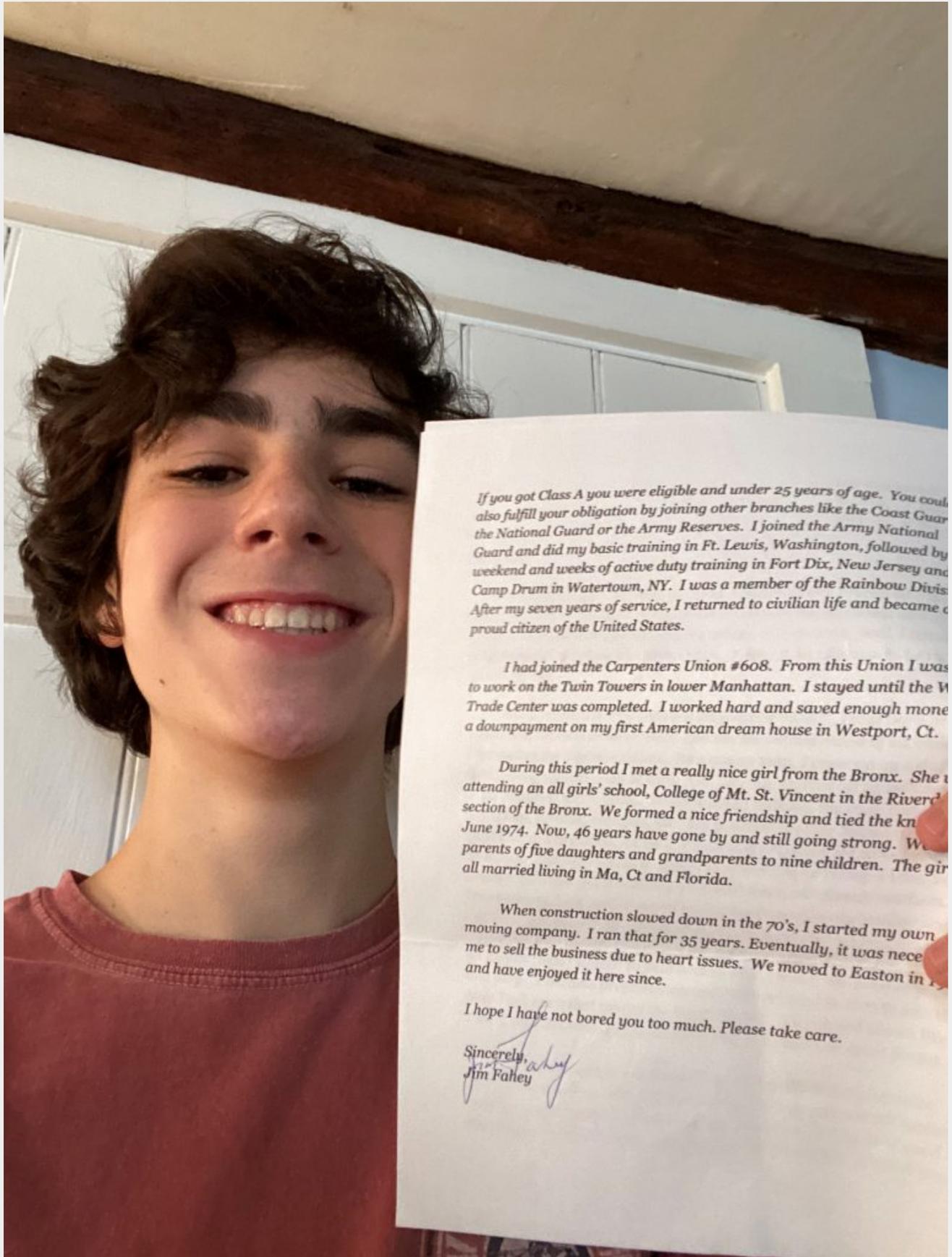
“While volunteering at the senior center over the summer, I learned so much from the seniors there and I wanted other students at Joel Barlow to get to know them too and hear about the many amazing experiences that they had,” Rozendaal said.

Buckley and Kaplan are happy about the program.

“Our pen pal venture continues to be really successful,” Buckley said. “Many seniors have been delighted by the friendships that have been established with local students.”



Jim Fahey



If you got Class A you were eligible and under 25 years of age. You could also fulfill your obligation by joining other branches like the Coast Guard, the National Guard or the Army Reserves. I joined the Army National Guard and did my basic training in Ft. Lewis, Washington, followed by weekend and weeks of active duty training in Fort Dix, New Jersey and Camp Drum in Watertown, NY. I was a member of the Rainbow Division. After my seven years of service, I returned to civilian life and became a proud citizen of the United States.

I had joined the Carpenters Union #608. From this Union I was able to work on the Twin Towers in lower Manhattan. I stayed until the World Trade Center was completed. I worked hard and saved enough money to make a downpayment on my first American dream house in Westport, Ct.

During this period I met a really nice girl from the Bronx. She was attending an all girls' school, College of Mt. St. Vincent in the Riverdale section of the Bronx. We formed a nice friendship and tied the knot in June 1974. Now, 46 years have gone by and still going strong. We are the parents of five daughters and grandparents to nine children. The girls are all married living in Ma, Ct and Florida.

When construction slowed down in the 70's, I started my own moving company. I ran that for 35 years. Eventually, it was necessary for me to sell the business due to heart issues. We moved to Easton in 1990 and have enjoyed it here since.

I hope I have not bored you too much. Please take care.

Sincerely,
Jim Fahey

Reed Cooper

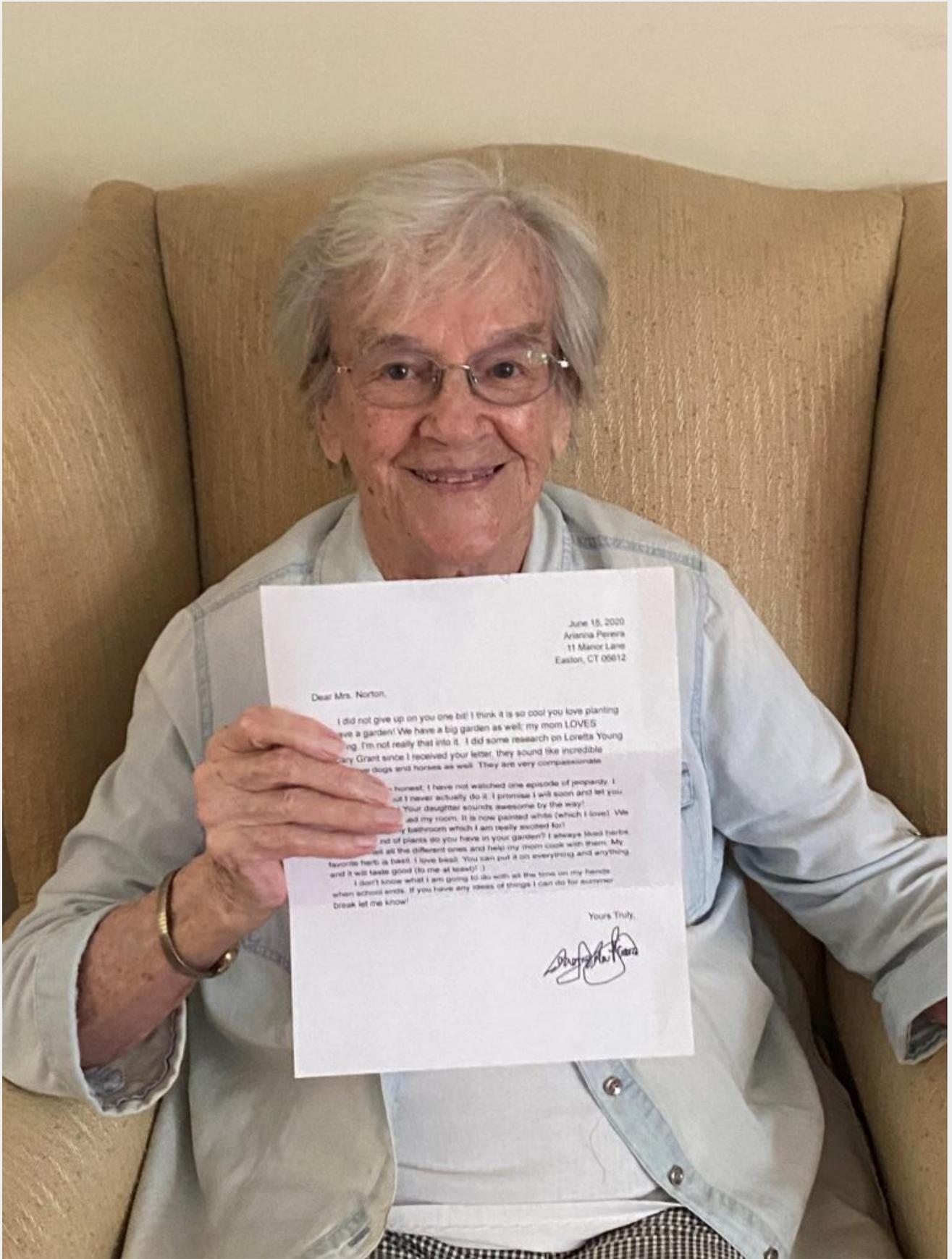
Rita and Richard Seclow were paired with two Barlow students. Rita Seclow, 89, signed up for the program, thinking it would be a good opportunity to show high school students the lost art of letter writing. She's come away with gratitude for the connection she's made.

"It's enlarged my world because I have no contact with people that age who I'm not related to," said Rita.

Richard Seclow, 90, has had a similar experience. He's written three letters to his pen pal, a Barlow student.

Arianna Pereira, 12, a Keller student, has been writing to Annette Norton, 99. In their letters they share stories about their dogs, their favorites movies, colors, and television shows.

"Mrs. Norton has a garden and she talks about her plants," Pereira said. "She told me how much she likes Jeopardy, so I'll have to watch it."



June 15, 2020
Arianna Perera
11 Manor Lane
Easton, CT 06012

Dear Mrs. Norton,

I did not give up on you one bit! I think it is so cool you love planting
a garden! We have a big garden as well, my mom LOVES
ing. I'm not really that into it. I did some research on Loretta Young
ary Grant since I received your letter, they sound like incredible
r dogs and horses as well. They are very compassionate

honest, I have not watched one episode of jeopardy. I
d I never actually do it, I promise I will soon and let you
Your daughter sounds awesome by the way!

ed my room. It is now painted white (which I love). We
y bathroom which I am really excited for!

nd of plants do you have in your garden? I always liked herbs

all the different ones and help my mom cook with them. My
favorite herb is basil. I love basil. You can put it on everything and anything
and it will taste good (to me at least)! I

I don't know what I am going to do with all the tons on my hands
when school ends. If you have any ideas of things I can do for summer
Break let me know!

Yours Truly,

Annette Norton

Cheryl Norton, Annette Norton's daughter, said her mother loves exchanging letters with Pereira. Their new friendship gives her mother something to look forward to while she continues to quarantine.

"After my mother sent her letter she wondered when Arianna would answer her back, and then the letter came one day," Norton said.

Kaplan said the beautiful relationship that has blossomed between Norton and Pereira warms her heart.

"Collaborating with Val Buckley over the past years to bring Easton senior citizens together with our middle school students has been a joy," said Kaplan.