Collaboration is the lifeblood of Greater Plymouth Area, Wisconsin. Every success story there is about a community pulling together to help all ages.

In 1985, they developed their first intergenerational program after Here We Grow Child Care Center mixed their activities with the Plymouth Senior Center, South Horizons Apartments and Valley Manor Nursing Home.

Today, the intergenerational activities are at Generations, a 28,000-square-foot facility on a seven-acre campus.

Middle school students, bussed there after classes, play board games, Wii, pool and ping pong with the older adults.

Longtime resident, Doreen Salkowski, remembered teaching three teens how to play Canasta, a card game from Uruguay.

“Boy, they struggled, but they felt accomplished when they were finished!” Salkowski explained. “They still tell me how they enjoyed learning to play.”

The Plymouth Intergenerational Coalition’s Programming Committee, which meets monthly, suggests programs, monitors levels of intergenerational activities and shares information to build community awareness.

Donna Counselman, a retired educator, saw first-hand an intergenerational activity transform an older adult, who once held negative stereotypes of teens.

“Sometimes the news makes me think that all teenagers are bad people,” she told Counselman.

After watching 13-year-olds in the Head Start Pals group read to 3-year-olds, she said: “I certainly can see this is not the case in our community!”

The New Year’s Eve “Cheese Drop” is another activity all ages enjoy.

“There is free coffee and hot chocolate for revelers who brave the cold and come downtown,” recalled Marsha Vollbrecht, Generations founder.

The community knew they qualified for the 2015 Best Intergenerational Community Awards.

“We are not shy about sharing successes,” noted Joann Van Horn Wieland, executive director of Generations.

A huge success is Generations, a $4.2 million building funded by a public/private campaign that brought all ages together through bake sales, collecting aluminum cans, and a community party with raffles and a silent auction. Funds were raised from large companies and donors, along with a few dollars donated by every day citizens.
Generations got help from Donald Krauss – a longtime resident moved by the work for all ages – when he left the Plymouth Intergenerational Coalition, the library and the Plymouth Senior Center nearly $600,000 in his will.

Additionally, $1.1 million came from a stimulus grant and $15,000 came from the State of Wisconsin Department of Commerce, which was established to help with a community needs assessment.

The local restaurants got involved, hosting “Guest Bartender” nights, where adult residents worked behind the bar. In exchange, the restaurants offered matching funds.

When Generations paid off its mortgage two years after it opened, all ages celebrated with a mortgage-burning party.

“We are very proud of what we have worked on for so many years,” explained Wieland, who also noted the Endowment Fund the community established for its intergenerational programs.

Greater Plymouth Area is still in high spirits since the news of being a 2015 Best Intergenerational Communities Award winner.

“I was so thrilled,” Wieland recalled, “that I was hugging people, sharing the news with seniors in our exercise classes.”

When she shared the news at the Board meeting, Vollbrecht, Generations founder, jumped out of her seat and cheered.

Greater Plymouth Area hopes the award will bring more financial resources from existing and new partners for their intergenerational work.