

# Erie High School students honor local seniors

Freshmen write biographies for National Older Americans Month

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Erie High School freshman Stephanie Pratt, left, interviews Carol Melampy on Thursday at the Erie Community Center. About 30 freshmen interviewed Boulder County seniors about their lives and local history. (Jeremy Papasso Staff Photographer)

Generations collided at the Erie Community Center on Thursday as local high school students launched a project that will honor area seniors.

About 30 freshmen from honors English classes at Erie High School interviewed Boulder County residents age 55 and older about their lives and local history.

Students questioned a cowboy from Wyoming, a Hungarian transplant and a woman whose family has been in Erie for more than 150 years.

Maxine Canaday, 84, reminisced with fellow Erie resident Sneat Haile, 15, about childhood memories and the town's simpler days.

Canaday was born at her grandmother's house at the end of Cheesman Street when Erie was known as the "heart of the Northern Colorado coal camps."



Erie High School freshman Michael Spetalier takes notes while interviewing Ken Rice on Thursday at the Erie Community Center. (*Jeremy Papasso / Staff Photographer*)

She grew up in a "converted chicken coop" and played outside with her cousins and neighborhood kids.

"We were poor but we didn't know we were poor because we always had enough food and place to sleep," Canaday said.

Many of Canaday's childhood stories revolved around World War II when the entire town would gather at the post office awaiting word from soldiers overseas.

Anyone who got a letter from a military member would let everyone else read it "so we would all know what the boys were up to," Canaday said.

Canaday showed Sneat a 1945 copy of the Erie Herald featuring front-page news about locals who "spent Sunday in Denver with relatives."

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The pair flipped through Canaday's 1950 high school yearbook and looked at a black and white photo of the town's first football team sporting leather helmets in 1947.

Canaday said the interview was "really fun," and she enjoyed the chance to recall some memories that she hadn't thought about in years.

Teacher Carrie Mitchell said the assignment provides an opportunity for students to engage with an older generation that has vast experience and wisdom to share.

"It's a taste of the real world," Mitchell said. "I think that's really important for young people to have."

Cindy Hickman, active adults coordinator for the Erie Community Center, said the project gives the students and seniors a chance to see one another in a different light.

Students will spend the next month writing the personal history of their partner, which will be published, archived and presented to the seniors during a celebration of National Older Americans Month on May 19.

"It's important for them to have someone listen to their stories," Hickman said. "There's so much history and experience there and it's great to have someone listen who cares about what they have to say."

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Erie High School freshman Hailey Keller interviews Evelyn Lane on Thursday at the Erie Community Center. (Jeremy Papasso Staff Photographer)