Journalism

Just give Dennis the videogame control, she'll line up her shot and send her virtual ball rolling down the alley for that big strike. If she misses a pin here or there, she'll get them on the next roll for a spare.

Ludel Dennis is one heck of a bowler.

Not one bowler in their red Eliza Bryant Village Wii Bowlers shirts has yet to match her perfect 300 score. They keep trying on Thursday afternoons.

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Jim Sheeler's multimedia journalism students at Case Western Reserve University caught the action with their flip video cameras during practice in the Manor House's television room at the retirement village on Wade Park.

Players line up — some in their wheelchairs — for their turn before the large flat screen TV.

Dennis is a tough opponent but a great asset for the team's competitive players in their 60s, 70s and 80s.

Teammates Eddie Williams, Delores Bowden and Ananias Lawrence didn't hesitate to boast

about their Wii victories against opponents from other retirement communities.

Sheeler's students — Molly Drake, Emily Hoffman and Jonathan Monreal — have spent class time capturing the life stories and activities of these residents who live in Cleveland's Hough neighborhood. They plan to create a Web-based repository of these stories, audiotapes and images.

"The residents are so excited to have these students interview them," said Larie R. Goggins, Eliza Bryant's director of housing. She helped Sheeler's students connect with the residents.

The idea for the Department of English journalism course grew out of Sheeler's Pulitzer Prize winning reporting for the Rocky Mountain News. He wrote about what made each individual unique — and in what for many would be the last chance to have their stories told.

Sheeler, who now holds the Shirley Wormser Professorship of Journalism and Media Writing, said visiting the home takes him back to his reporting days.

"This class has turned into more of an internship for the students," he said, adding he likes being able to monitor, coach, and teach interview techniques as they take place.

Just how important the students' work is was a lesson learned.

The levity of the bowling overshadows a sense of loss for Sheeler's students. Early in the semester, they encountered Andrew Bailey, 78. The resident, who appeared healthy, suddenly died in the middle of their project. His legacy is a story of a loving husband who cared deeply for his frail wife, Ethel.

On foot, Bailey made more than a dozen trips daily from his apartment to visit her at the adjacent nursing home facility and comfort her by holding her hand and helping with physical therapy exercises.

Through their classroom work, the students have preserved his story to share with others who may never have encountered this everyday man and this love story.

It's the kind of life story that won Sheeler a Pulitzer Prize for the article, "Final Salute," about a Marine casualty notification officer and the people he touched while delivering the news that every military family dreads.

On Thursday afternoons earlier this semester, Bailey sat down and talked about his life with Drake and Hoffman, until the day he suddenly died in late February.

"If we had not been there for the month and a half before his death, that story would have been lost," Sheeler said.

Sheeler said, "The minute I walked into Eliza Bryant, I knew this home was a place to start the class project."

"It is teeming with stories and storytellers who have the time to tell them," he said.