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Longtime Volunteer's Legacy Lives on with the Music Always Fund

Marie Sansone Zucchero

was something of a celebrity at Bethesda Dilworth. She volunteered there for more than 40 years, playing the piano and bringing her gift of music to residents with her fellow Ding-a-Lings, a choir of volunteer and resident singers Marie founded. They serenaded residents and staff every Thursday with classic songs of their youth that haven't been played on the radio in decades.

In fact, to honor her years of extraordinary support and service, and specifically her commitment to the residents of Bethesda Dilworth, Marie received Bethesda's prestigious Norwood Award in 2007.

"Everyone at Dilworth knew Marie," **Amy George Rush**, Marie's

second oldest grandchild, says. "It was like walking around with a celebrity in the halls of Dilworth. It was heartwarming to see my grandma be a kind of rock star at the nursing home."

Amy first started coming to Bethesda with Marie to visit her great-grandmother, Marie's mother, who suffered from advanced Alzheimer's and was living at Bethesda Dilworth. Marie would play her favorite Italian songs for her mother and noticed some of the other residents enjoyed her music by the piano as well.

Over the years, Marie began attracting a larger crowd of residents, staff and volunteers to join her for sing-a-longs at the piano. Eventually, she started the Ding-a-Lings.

MARIE SANSONE ZUCCHERO



Lovingly nicknamed "Mama Dia" by her granddaughters, as in "mother of the day," Marie is described as the quintessential mother figure. She was incredibly giving with her time, talent, and kindness, and she loved spreading joy through her passion for the piano. And playing it for her residents.

"There was nothing that could stop Mama Dia from coming to play at Bethesda on Thursdays," says **Mary Noel George**, Marie's third oldest grandchild. "Inclement weather didn't matter. She wouldn't plan any other activities on Thursdays. Nothing stopped her from singing with her Ding-a-Lings for over 40 years."

And when Marie passed away earlier this year, her five granddaughters established the Marie Sansone Zucchero Music Always Fund, an endowed fund of \$50,000 to honor Marie's memory, thereby ensuring that residents at Bethesda always have the gift of music.

The "Always" in the Music Always Fund name comes from the song



Amy George Rush (second from left) and **Mary Noel George** (second from right) accept yellow vests from some of Marie's fellow Ding-a-Lings as honorary members of the group. The yellow vest is the uniform the Ding-a-Lings wear while performing.

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Vaccine Progress Brings New Normal to Independent Living

As of early May, more than 96% of residents throughout Bethesda communities have been fully vaccinated with the COVID-19 vaccine. For residents living in Bethesda's independent living communities, this vaccine progress, along with the overall increase in vaccinations, has allowed Bethesda's transportation services, which have been mostly shut down for the past year, to resume.

Prior to the pandemic, these residents enjoyed group trips to the grocery store, art museum, restaurants, and many other St. Louis destinations for socialization and fun activities. To ensure resident and staff safety, these trips were halted during the height of the pandemic.

Michelle Glass, Corporate Vice President of Senior Living and In-Home Services, says stopping transportation beyond necessary medical appointments was important to keep Bethesda residents safe—the risks associated with group activities was too great. Now, she is excited to see transportation and activities safely start back up again.

"I think having transportation running again brings back the independence to independent living," Michelle says. "Residents no longer have to depend on family or staff to help them with groceries, and they can know they are safe doing it now."

At Bethesda Barclay House, General Manager **Barb Jackson** had to get creative to help her residents get what they needed once transportation



During the pandemic, **Patricia Melechen** (right) brought her grocery list to **Barb Jackson** (left) each week for her to order delivery on Instacart while transportation services were halted.

services stopped. Resident **Patricia Melechen** was unable to get groceries for herself with no transportation of her own or nearby relatives to help.

"I'm grateful for Barb because without her help I don't know how I would have gotten any groceries," Patricia says. "We started a weekly routine where I would bring her my list and she would order my groceries for delivery."

Barb says the hardest part about the pandemic has been the lack of resident socialization. Exercise classes are popular with the residents, so the Bethesda Barclay House team got creative and added several classes each week to properly distance residents while keeping the classes open.

Now that so many residents are vaccinated, everyone is looking forward to loosening restrictions on social activities. Patricia looks

forward to returning to her favorite beauty parlor, the art museum and weekly grocery trips.

"I'm looking forward to social outings resuming so residents can get out of their apartments and enjoy a change of scenery," Barb says. "We've been able to open our dining room to allow four people per table and that has really helped with socialization."

Bethesda is continuing to offer COVID-19 vaccinations at all six independent living community to ensure new residents and employees have access to the vaccine. Michelle says she would like to see everything back to normal for independent living residents by the end of the summer.

"I hope to see no limits other than room capacity on activities," Michelle says. "I'd like to see family coming and going as they please, and residents safely getting back to their active and fun lifestyles." ■

Independent Living Provides Safety and Security for Seniors

For many residents, living in a Bethesda retirement community offers comfort and socialization opportunities that they would not have living on their own.

Last year presented many challenges for seniors and their families, causing feelings of loneliness and isolation to sharply increase. This time has been especially worrisome for people who do not live in the same area as their loved ones.

Lynn Burkhardt's 93-year-old mother, **Rita Scherer**, started having difficulty doing some tasks for herself and was feeling lonelier than usual at the beginning of 2020. Rita was living alone in Wisconsin, where Lynn was born and lived before moving to St. Louis.

"My son and I are the only surviving relatives left in my family, and it was hard knowing my Mom was so far away," says Lynn. "She and I had some tough conversations, but ultimately decided together it would be best for her to move to St. Louis."

Lynn and Rita looked into a few different retirement communities in St. Louis, but ultimately decided Bethesda Orchard was the perfect place for Rita.

"The friendliness of the staff at Bethesda Orchard made us both feel so at ease with our decision. My mom is still very independent, so she loves having her own apartment, but the peace of mind knowing someone would be there to help in an emergency is really nice," Lynn says.

Rita moved into Bethesda Orchard in June of 2020. They



Rita Scherer (front right) is encouraged by wellness coordinator **Xander Garcia** during an exercise class at Bethesda Orchard.

utilized Bethesda's "Moving with Ease" program, which provides move coordination, including packing and unpacking; downsizing and design assistance. Residents receive a \$3,000 allowance to help cover the costs of these services.

"It was really just me doing most of the work to move my mom to St. Louis, so having help and support from Bethesda's moving team was incredible," says Lynn.

Since moving in, Rita has enjoyed going for walks in the Webster area to admire the beautiful gardens and flowers in bloom at many neighborhood homes. Although she doesn't have a car, Rita is still able to be an active participant in the local community, frequenting the farmers market, shops and bookstore by foot.

"People here have been so nice and friendly, it made the transition quite easy," says Rita.

"My mom has settled into her new home nicely. She loves

playing Wii bowling with her neighbors, she has a group of residents that she plays cards with every Friday night, and she attends the exercise classes a few days a week," Lynn says. "I'm really glad to have her close to home, and it's nice being able to see her more often and spend time together doing things she loves."

Like many of the Bethesda seniors who have been fully vaccinated, Rita is excited for things to get back to normal so she can participate in more socialization activities and meet more of her fellow residents.

"I keep hearing about all the fun things Bethesda used to plan for us and I can't wait for things to return to normal so I can experience the fun first-hand," says Rita.

For more information on living your best life at Bethesda Orchard, please contact Eloise at 314-963-2296. ■

Bethesda Classes Provide Opportunities for Career Advancement



Congratulations to (l-r) **Precious Jones, Jamaica Minniefield, Sadia Sheppard, Cheyenne Wilson, and Selah Love**, five of the nine Dilworth employees who comprised the April 2021 class of certified nursing assistant (CNA) program graduates! The certified nursing assistant (CNA) program is part of Bethesda's "Career Ladder," which offers

educational opportunities to help our employees further their careers. "This program supports Bethesda's mission of providing career advancement opportunities for our employees," says **Eileen Caffey**, Bethesda's Director of Recruitment and Retention. "We love to help our team grow and learn new things and it was great to see this awesome group of women achieve this big accomplishment. We are so proud of them!" (Not pictured—**Chinesa Gomillia, Alicia McKay, Felicia Mitchell-Shannon, and Khadijah Wilson.**) ■

Thank-You Letter

(Editor's note: It seems that we often find ourselves on the receiving end of some wonderful letters written by family of residents or residents. We are very appreciative of these letters and thought that we would share a recent letter that touched us.)

Dear Bethesda Meadow,

In 2016, our family was thrown into a scary situation—our mother had to be placed in a skilled nursing facility. We knew then this would be where she should live out her last days.

Everyone tells you to shop around, interview people and take your time with such a big decision. Shopping and studying for such a decision was a luxury we did not have. As we were being pressured to take her out of the hospital, a social worker casually mentioned something might be available at Bethesda Meadow. I made a call right away.

From that moment everything fell right into place. It was emotional and a difficult transition for our family and especially our mother, yet the choice of Bethesda always felt right.

Five years later, we don't know how to thank you all enough for everything. Please know it was never taken for granted or unnoticed. There are also angels from every department that have been a joy to meet and to see them interact and make a point of knowing our mother—activities, social workers, laundry, housekeeping, dietary, maintenance and volunteers.

As our family now moves through the stages of grief, I realize how much all of you have been a part of our lives. Thank you each and every one of you for the amazing and loving job you do. It matters more than you can ever know.



Barb Jackson (second from right) accepting her honor from SSD students and staff in a socially distant ceremony.

Barb Jackson Receives Honor from St. Louis Special School District

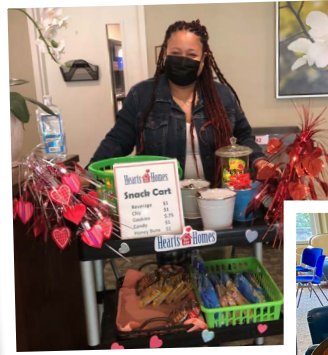
Congratulations to **Barb Jackson**, General Manager at Bethesda Barclay House in Clayton, who recently received the Special Ambassador Award from the Special School District (SSD) of St. Louis County.

For many years, Barb has coordinated the activities with the SSD students and staff who have participated in the Vocational Skills Program (VSP) at Bethesda Barclay House, which provides opportunities for students to gain the skills needed to achieve realistic and meaningful post-secondary goals on a volunteer basis.

Barb's partnership with SSD has made a difference in the lives of countless SSD students and staff members, according to **Danielle Barnhart**, VSP teacher and co-nominator. "We appreciate Barb and Barclay House for allowing opportunities for our students to learn job skills, especially during the pandemic," Danielle says. "We can't thank them enough." ■

The 2021 Hearts for Our Hearts annual fundraiser was in full swing in May and June, and our staff and residents always have creative ways for raising money for their communities:

Without question, Bethesda Orchard residents and staff have the cleanest cars around.



"Who wants snacks for a great cause? Village North has snacks for a great cause!"



At Bethesda Meadow, **Destinee Williams** has clearly mastered the essence of the wine bottle ring toss—nice job!



How can anyone pass up the opportunity to enjoy some of these delicious homemade baked goodies, baked by these talented ladies at Bethesda Gardens?

Between vaccinations and good weather, our residents were more than ready to get out (or stay in) and get active!



Residents at Barnes-Jewish Extended Care keep an "eye on the balloon" during a fun game of balloon volleyball.

These Bethesda Orchard residents know that the key to a successful game of cornhole is all in the wrist!



What could possibly make it feel more like baseball season than a visit from Fredbird, as the Bethesda Dilworth residents experienced in May?

Rumor has it that the winner of this intense Rummikub game at Bethesda Terrace would get extra ice cream in their root beer float!



Bethesda Uses Local Job Fairs to Fill Open Positions

Over the last year during the pandemic, Bethesda has participated in multiple virtual job fairs, often partnering with local organizations like the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis, Missouri Job Center, and local community colleges and universities.

In May, however, for the first time in over a year, Bethesda participated at in-person job fairs, which are preferable because they provide optimum opportunities for recruiters to meet and talk with the candidates face-to-face.

“Job fairs are a great way for Bethesda to connect with the community,” says **Eileen Caffey**, Bethesda’s Director of Recruitment and Employee Relations. “When people in St. Louis are looking for a job, we want them to be so familiar with Bethesda that we’re the first place they think of applying.

“The main positions we’re hiring for are true caregivers like certified nursing assistants (CNA), licensed practical nurses (LPN) and registered nurses (RN), but we also have open positions in our corporate office and in entry-level positions like maintenance, housekeeping, transportation

and activities,” Eileen says. “We are absolutely willing to train people for those entry level roles; we just want to hire people who are passionate about caring for others.”

In addition to training courses, Bethesda offers the “Career Ladder” program, a workforce development initiative for people who are interested in furthering their careers in healthcare. Participants begin with a class to become a CNA (see photo on p. 5) and have the option to work their way to becoming an LPN or an RN through a tuition-reimbursement program.

Bethesda is fortunate to have hired more than a few amazing employees from job fairs in recent years, like **Dontell Spears**, a driver at Village North Retirement Community.

“A few years back, my fiancé saw an Urban League job fair being promoted on social media, and I decided to attend to see what kind of positions they were hiring for,” Dontell says. “The two women I met from Bethesda were so kind and inviting that I knew this was going to be the right fit for me.”

Dontell started working in March of 2019 as a driver, and he says he has enjoyed getting to know his coworkers and the residents over the last two years.

“I had never been a driver before this job, but I’ve really fallen in love with it,” Dontell says. “The relationships I’ve built with the residents make me excited to come to work each day.”

All open positions, job summaries, and applications can be found at bethesdahealth.org/careers. ■

Driver **Dontell Spears** (right) helps resident **Harry Goff** into a Bethesda van for transportation services.

Music Always Fund

Continued from page 1

“Always,” composed by Irving Berlin in the late 1920s. Marie and her husband’s first dance at their wedding was to this song, and it became her favorite throughout her life. When it came time to name the fund, including “always” was a natural fit to *always* keep music a central part of the Bethesda community.

“We wanted to start the Music Always fund to honor Mama Dia and her legacy of music and service at the place she loved to play most,” Mary Noel says. “We want music to continue for the residents for years to come.”

Due to COVID-19, the Ding-a-Lings have been unable to sing together for the past year. However, **Darla Neely**, Volunteer Coordinator at Bethesda Dilworth, is hopeful that they will be able to sing together again soon.

“A lot of residents have been asking when the Ding-a-Lings will perform again,” Darla says. “It’s safe to say we are all very eager to hear them sing again, because whenever we hear them sing, we all think of Marie.”

In the final weeks before she passed away, Marie was still taking requests and playing the piano from memory for residents.

“Toward the end, when my grandmother couldn’t remember what our names were, she had no problem remembering how to play practically any song without looking at the sheet music,” Amy says. “She could just play like magic.”

To make a donation to the Marie Sansone Zuccherro Music Always Fund, please go to BethesdaHealth.org/giving-to-Bethesda/donate-today. ■



Did You Know...

... that the annual Hearts for Our Homes fundraiser is in the midst of another very successful campaign? We'll unveil the winner of the "Traveling Trophy" in the Fall issue of the *Pulse*. If you would like to make a donation, feel free to contact the Bethesda Foundation at 314-800-1981.

... that Bethesda is continuing to vaccinate new employees and residents? Ask a member of the team at your community or service on how to arrange a vaccine if you are still in need.

... that the 2020 Annual Report is available? Contact jrwaldman@bethesdahealth.org to receive a hard copy, or access the report on-line by visiting www.BethesdaHealth.org/publications-newsletters/

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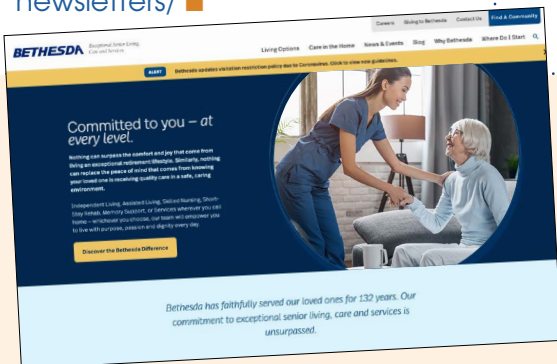
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Bethesda Unveils New-Look Website

We are thrilled to announce that Bethesda will launch a new website at the end of June at www.BethesdaHealth.org.

Some of the new features include:

- easy navigation with a modern, clean look and feel
- timely event pages with online registration
- simple newsletter registration for direct inbox delivery
- more videos and photos featuring people affiliated with Bethesda that you might recognize!

And don't forget to access Bethesda's Facebook pages to see what fun activities and events are taking place with our residents! ■

Thank you for your continued interest in Bethesda, and please "Like," "Follow" and "Share" the posts on our social media platforms!



In many cases, a community has its own Facebook page. Here are the links to those pages:

- www.facebook.com/BethesdaTerrace
- www.facebook.com/BethesdaBarclayHouse
- www.facebook.com/BethesdaGardensRetirement
- www.facebook.com/BethesdaOaks
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