

# DIAKON CONNECTION

WINTER-SPRING 2005

## For volunteers, building skills, forging friendships go hand in hand

Their smiles stretch from ear to ear. Between the hand motions and facial movements, they appear to share some sort of secret language as they break out in laughter.

While the casual observer may not understand what they are saying, there is no denying that the two people carrying on this conversation have a special friendship.

In fact, Nancy Santucci and Michael Hoosier have had a unique bond almost since the first day Hoosier came to work in *Luther Crest's* volunteer program, until recently overseen by Santucci.

The 24-year-old Alburts resident has been working with Susan LeVine, a life skills facilitator from Mainline Rehabilitation Associates, for almost two years. Injured in a car accident when he was 16, Hoosier has excelled in the Diakon retirement community's surroundings, as he has worked on developing his independent living skills.

"I love this place," says Hoosier with a smile. "I enjoy the work. I enjoy learning new skills and helping other people."

Before Hoosier could join Luther Crest's volunteer team, LeVine and a team

of rehabilitation specialists developed and implemented strategies and set goals for Hoosier that would give him the opportunity to live a more productive and independent life.

Together, Santucci and LeVine developed work-related activities that would be cognitively stimulating for Hoosier and also meet the needs of staff members.

It's easy to work with Hoosier because he brightens everyone's day with his pleasant demeanor and enthusiasm, says Santucci, who recently became marketing director at Luther Crest, Allentown.

"As with any organization that has a lean staff, our workload is heavy. Mike can provide a lot of assistance in terms of filing and computer projects that relieve a lot of the burden," she says, adding that he has also made fast friends with many of the residents. "He brings enthusiasm to everything he does. He is very talented and skilled, so anything we ask, he'll do."

"Or I'll at least try," quips Hoosier.

Since last summer, Hoosier, among other things, has visited with personal care residents and helped them select their meals for the week, learned new computer programs, delivered mail, and created centerpieces for parties—all the time increasing his skills as he has helped others.

"I reached every goal I set for myself," Hoosier says, referring to himself as the "helping hand." His next goal is a special one, specifically chosen by Santucci—completing the computer set-up of a new volunteer software package.

"This is a tremendous opportunity for Mike," says LeVine. "I am confident that he will achieve this goal as he has always met life's challenges."

"He was a good student, a great athlete, and currently is a most respected, valued, and beloved volunteer."

Nancy Santucci with Michael Hoosier.



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**DIAKON**  
LUTHERAN SOCIAL MINISTRIES  
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# Extended process leads to happy home for child

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Diakon serves some 70,000 persons annually in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Delaware through adoption, foster care, counseling, retirement communities, volunteer home care, congregational ministries, hospice services, and more.

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The Kings had heard the adoption process could sometimes be lengthy, yet they never thought that situation would hold true for them.

But nearly two years into the process, with a match still not made, Earline King admits she and her husband had the thought: "Maybe we don't want to do this."

In April of last year, after not having been selected for either of two children whose profiles they reviewed, the Kings saw their luck begin to change.

"We were interviewed [after receiving a third child's profile] and for whatever reason, we were picked," Mrs. King says. "Once they picked us, we were able to see a picture of her."

It wasn't long before King, her husband, Alvinzar, and six-year-old Armani met with caseworkers at the child's foster home. Although her caseworker had prepared her for the meeting, Armani was nervous and stayed close to her foster mother.

"It was like a first date—everybody's nervous," remembers Mrs. King. "We told her things about ourselves and brought pictures of our family."

By their second meeting, at a McDonald's playground, the walls started to come down.

"Al and I sat and watched her play and let her ask us questions," she says. "We also took her to the store and let her pick out an Easter dress."

A blended family with six children, the youngest still at home, the Kings made sure one visit included a chance for Armani to meet her future siblings.

"She was really excited about meeting them," Mrs. King says, adding that they had two more visits together before they could bring Armani home for the weekend.

Because the end of the school year was

approaching, Armani didn't move into their home until the second week of June. The extended process made the transition easier for their new daughter, Mrs. King believes.

"By that time, she had stayed overnight a couple of times. She felt at home and was comfortable with us," she says. "It worked out perfectly. We weren't in a rush. She could take her time to get to know us, spend weekends with us, and go to church with us."

In January, more than three years after they began the adoption process, the Kings finalized Armani's adoption. They say the adoption has worked out better than they imagined.

"It is absolutely typical family life," Mrs. King says, adding that Armani and her brother Zachary, also 6, argue like siblings all the time. "She seems like she was made for us. It's really neat."

## WISH LIST

Diakon Adoption Services can use your assistance. If you or your congregation are able to donate any of these items or provide funding for their purchase, please contact Diakon's advancement office at 1-877-342-5667, ext. 1219. Thank you!

- Proxima projector
- Digital camera and camcorder
- Overhead projector and screen
- Gift bags (all sizes) and tissue paper
- Drawing paper
- Bookstore gift cards (to buy adoption book for child)
- Video-store gift cards
- Office desk and chair

### The King family.



# Volunteers show real Christmas spirit



Carol Miller, director of volunteer services for The Lutheran Home at Topton, displays some of the items donated for the Christmas Sharing shop.

A steady hum of holiday happiness. Santa hats atop friendly faces concentrating on the tasks at hand. Dozens of hands carefully wrapping gifts and tying bows.

If you think the scene sounds like Santa's workshop at the height of Christmas preparations, you'd be close.

This Christmas shop, however, was staffed by residential-accommodation residents of Diakon's *The Lutheran Home at Topton*, as well as members of local Lutheran congregations, who volunteer each year to make the holiday special for Topton residents.

The Christmas Sharing program has existed at The Lutheran Home at Topton for more years than anyone can recall—at least 20, says Carol Miller, director of volunteer services.

The program has two components. The first is a "store" set up for residents of the campus' nursing and assisted living centers to do their Christmas shopping for family and friends, free of cost. Local Lutheran congregations donate items to stock the store, with merchandise ranging from clothing, perfume, jewelry, and books to aftershave, nightgowns, toys, and tins of cookies.

Congregation members, Topton staff, and residential-accommodation residents help the residents to select gifts and then wrap, tag, and deliver them. The store is open during the first week of December.

The second portion of the program involves "Secret Santa" gift-giving. Because of the generosity of the congregations, there are sufficient items for each resident to receive a gift, wrapped and delivered as a surprise. Any items remaining are donated to the campus activities department and to local shelters.

Carole Fiori, a resident of Luther Haven on the Topton campus, has volunteered with the Christmas Sharing program for the last three years. This year, she helped to keep track of gifts that had been selected by residents and

to make certain there was a Secret Santa gift for everyone.

Fiori, who says she likes to pitch in whenever she can, also helps at the Topton library and in transporting residents who use wheelchairs to Sunday worship services.

"The Christmas Sharing is my favorite volunteer job," she says. "It's all set up so beautifully and everyone has a good time. We just couldn't do it without the churches donating all that they do."

## WISH LIST

The Lutheran Home at Topton can use your assistance. If you or your congregation are able to donate any of these items or provide funding for their purchase, please contact Diakon's Office of Advancement at 1-877-342-5667, ext. 1219. Thank you!

- Rock-n-Go wheelchairs
- Outdoor benches and patio furniture
- Specialty mattresses
- Hi-low electric beds
- Holiday/special event table linens
- Gas grills (two)
- Aviary
- Medicare sit-to-stand lift.
- Medicare full-body lift.

## Family Life Services Gift recognizes volunteer couple's commitment

When Karen Rothermel announced her retirement as administrator of the Lutheran church's *West Berks Mission District* after 25 years, district council members knew they wanted to honor her years of service with more than a watch or crystal vase.

"We didn't want to get her 'stuff,'" says Ruth Pawlyk, council chair. "We wanted to make a contribution to a place where it would make a difference."

Determining where to make that contribution wasn't difficult. Rothermel and her husband, Robert, are volunteers with Diakon's Family Life Services – Northeastern Pennsylvania and have long been enthusiastic supporters of the program's marriage preparation series.

"We know that Karen and Bob have volunteered in this ministry for many years, and we knew it was important to her," says Pawlyk. The council gathered approximately \$1,100 in donations from member

congregations to contribute to the program in Rothermel's honor.

The donation is clearly an affirmation of the program's ministry, says Terry Lieb, Family Life Services executive director, adding that the gift is well-deserved recognition for the Rothermels, who have volunteered since shortly after the program began.

"They have done just about every piece of the program—leading small groups and being a presenting couple—whatever there is to do," he says. "Their commitment is evident. They see programs that support marriage as essential to the creation of stable families and a stronger society."

Pleased to learn of the donation, Rothermel says her participation in the marriage preparation program has proven to be helpful to her as well as to engaged couples.

"It's a great program. We wish we would have had something like it when we were preparing for marriage," she says. "It is fulfilling

to us. It reinforces some skills [in our own marriage] that we get neglectful about."

The program's effects are far-reaching, adds Lieb. "When we stabilize marriages and relationships," he says, "everyone benefits."

Robert and Karen Rothermel.



## Hospice Saint John

# Thomas 'seizes the moment' to serve others



Part-time teacher Patricia Miller of Honesdale had always loved instructing children, but without the help of Diakon's *Hospice Saint John* volunteer Edwin Thomas, she would have had to put that joy aside.

Five years ago, Miller's husband was dying. As primary caregiver, Miller found leaving her home Tuesday afternoons to teach a religion class at St. John Evangelist Church in Honesdale nearly impossible. Then Hospice Saint John came into the picture.

For six of the seven months that Miller's husband was under the care of the Hospice Saint John team, Thomas volunteered to stay with him during class times, providing respite for Patricia Miller.

"I can't even begin to describe what this meant to me," says Miller. "I left a place where I knew my husband was dying, and I was heading to a place filled with bubbly third-graders who were happy to see me. It was so good for my mind."

Situations such as Miller's are the reason Thomas joined the Hospice Saint John volunteer team 24 years ago.

"From an early age, my mother took my sister and me to visit the sick. It was not an unusual thing for me to be around the sick. When I was older, I'd take food to the ill, so the seed of service was planted by my parents," says Thomas.

Many years later, he found himself again caring for the sick—only this time it was his own mother who had cancer. Following her death, he learned that Hospice Saint John was recruiting volunteers and attended a

volunteer-training session.

"Ed is an incredibly warm, giving kind of guy. I don't think he's ever said no to anything I've asked of him," says Bob Perks, Hospice Saint John volunteer coordinator, Pittston office. "He is one of our longest volunteers. He will do more than you expect him to do. I know when I put Ed with a patient, he will encompass everything the patient and his or her family needs and then some."

Over the years, Thomas has been known to mow lawns, prune hedges, stoke coal stoves, telephone families, and warm up meals, but what may be his most important volunteer effort is simply being there for patients and their families.

"I don't think the average person realizes that when you are caring for a dying loved one, you cannot go anywhere out of your home unless you have a caregiver like Ed," says Miller. "Ed was so dedicated and faithful, I knew that when he said he was going to be here, he'd be here. That meant so much. He would even show up early and spend 10 minutes or so talking with me after I returned home. My husband didn't speak much, so it was so nice to have a conversation."

Thomas has touched the lives of countless individuals in similar ways. And since his retirement five-and-one-half years ago as a state Department of Welfare supervisor, he now has even more time to embrace his calling.

"When I take on a task, I am there for the long haul. I find this position a privilege—it is a privilege to be invited into patients' homes and lives, especially at this point in their lives," he says.

The work can sometime be challenging, he admits, but if he has apprehensions, he quickly dashes them with thoughts of Mother Teresa. "If a little 97-pound lady could care for the dying, why can't a 200-pound man with modern conveniences take care of the dying for an hour or so? That puts what I am doing into perspective."

Living each day with wisdom taken from the words of French-born Quaker Stephen Grellet, Thomas finds truth in the passage, "I expect to pass through this world but once. Any good thing, therefore, that I can do or any kindness I can show to any fellow human being let me do it now. Let me not defer nor neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again."

"I just want to seize the moment now that I am able to do it," says Thomas. "Later, when I look back, I will be glad I did."

Seizing the day—each and every day—Hospice Saint John volunteers such as Thomas walk a path like no other. Celebrating life as it passes away, they offer by their presence stability, comfort, and peace at a time when it is most needed.

"There has to be something so deep-rooted in our volunteers," believes Perks. "Their spirit of volunteerism connects not only on a spiritual level, but it is part of who they are and what they believe in. That is what makes them so special."



Edith Thrash, left, manager of Diakon's Volunteer Home Care program in the Hazleton-Lehigh region, received the Bishop Touhsaent Award at the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod's social ministry celebration in the fall. The Bishop Touhsaent Award recognizes outstanding social ministry efforts. With Thrash is Priscilla Kinney, synod vice president.



As part of the celebration, social ministry organizations within the synod presented Love in Action awards for leadership. Diakon's recipient was Mitch Possinger, center, long-time board member of Diakon and predecessor organizations. With Possinger are Susan Schellenberg, left, a Diakon board member, and the Rev. Daun E. McKee, Ph.D., president/CEO.

# Family Life Services

## Abstinence education gives children power to say no

‘Abstinence is best’ is a message many parents and church leaders want to send young people. It’s also the theme of a program that Diakon’s *Family Life Services – Northeastern Pennsylvania* has been bringing to middle-school children in the Greater Reading area.

“We tell them that abstinence is a very good option and these are all the benefits you are going to get out of it,” says Natalie Pletz, one of several program presenters. “It is hard to stand on your own as a youth and say no. We help them learn the skills necessary to complete this task.”

Family Life Services began offering the 12-hour program more than a year ago after receiving grant funding to serve inner-city youths within Berks County. In 2004, the grant was renewed for another year, in large part because of the program’s success.

“Abstinence is Best’ comes with a set curriculum that includes videos, games, and exercises,” says Catherine Scott, program coordinator. “Targeted at 12- to 15-year-old children, it is a very flexible program that can be offered in everything from one-hour weekly sessions to weekend workshops.”

Tyna Kaltenbaugh, director of youth ministry for Holy Spirit Lutheran Church in Reading, thought the program would be a perfect fit for the Girls Breakfast Club. Led by an ecumenical group of women volunteers, the club brings together at-risk middle school

girls from the local district to discuss issues important to them.

“Abstinence came up in our sexuality issues. I felt it was important for them to hear this piece of it,” Kaltenbaugh says. “I brought it forth to the other women in the group. They were in agreement that this was worthwhile. After we saw the material, I also used it in our Sunday school junior-senior high group.”

The program is intentionally presented in a casual manner, notes Pletz. “The youth sit down in a circle with us, and we talk with them. It’s not like we are lecturing them,” she says. “We try to get them as interested as possible so they start asking a lot of questions that they might not feel comfortable asking their parents or teachers.”

The Rev. Bruce Osterhout of Christ Lutheran Church, Reading, believes the program offers a message young people need to hear.

“[Children] are getting messages [about sex] all the time, so why not give them abstinence messages,” asks Osterhout, whose congregation hosted the Family Life Services program for its youth. “It may very well stop them from being sexually active.”

Sex can be a difficult issue to talk about with kids, but Osterhout believes the program opens the door. The Family Life Services “approach to abstinence programming is a strong approach, especially when there are other supportive adults around” during the program, he says. “Some of the children have

parents who were teenage moms themselves. If we’re trying to break that cycle, I think the message is critical.”

What is also critical, says Terry Lieb, Family Life Services executive director, is that people understand the program goes beyond teaching healthy decisions regarding sexual behavior.

“We are hoping to build these young folks up,” he says, noting that discussions also focus on self-respect, healthy relationships, setting goals, and avoiding drug and alcohol use. “We want them to make better decisions in many aspects of their everyday life.”

## WISH LIST

Family Life Services – Northeastern Pennsylvania can use your assistance. If you or your congregation are able to donate any of these items or provide funding for their purchase, please contact Diakon’s advancement office at 1-877-342-5667, ext. 1219. Thank you!

- Conference chairs (new or used in good condition)
- Two Loveseats and chairs for counseling office
- Reading-area congregation to provide use of copier for Berks Singles Support Group mailings
- Combination fax/scanner
- Volunteers to assist with office work

## Love of billiards draws generations together



Members of the Delta Tau Delta fraternity pose with Luther Crest billiards players following their competition.

A common love for the game of billiards recently brought two generations together at Diakon’s *Luther Crest Retirement Community* in Allentown.

All 31 members of Muhlenberg College’s Delta Tau Delta fraternity arrived early one Saturday morning this fall to challenge Luther Crest residents at one of their favorite pastimes.

“They beat us about 10 games to three. The ones they lost were due only to technicalities,” admits William Feingold, a member of Delta Tau Delta and the Class of 2006. “We enjoyed it nonetheless, and everybody said they would do it again.”

The groups got together after Garry Hennis, senior vice president for Diakon’s Retirement and Health Care Services and the fraternity’s regional chapter advisor, suggested it to Feingold as a possible community service project.

“The guys really enjoyed talking to the men at Luther Crest. They are interesting people with interesting stories to tell,” Feingold says.

“We’d like to do it again, at least two to four times a year.”

# Although 'retired,' pastor actively shares faith and goodwill at Manatawny Manor



The Rev. Morry Longstreth, center, has been leading Bible study at Manatawny Manor for nearly 14 years. Adult Day Services clients Michael Gula, left, and Ernest Mutter, right, helped to lead a holiday sing-along during Longstreth's visit the week before Christmas.

Nearly 14 years ago, the Rev. Morry Longstreth walked through the front doors of Diakon's *Manatawny Manor* and volunteered to lead Bible study sessions for residents. He had retired from full-time service in the Episcopal Church, into which he was ordained 41 years ago, but wanted to continue to minister to those around him.

Longstreth had recently relocated from Gladwyne to the Pottstown area and his new home was close to Manatawny Manor. Thus he found his new "congregation."

"I just thought I should exercise my

ministry," he says. "So I began working with the adult day services clients and added [skilled nursing] residents after that."

Calling himself "semi-retired," Longstreth describes a life that is as full of ministry and goodwill as that of clergy called to congregations. In addition to his visits at Manatawny Manor, he teaches English at the Pottstown campus of Montgomery County Community College and is a volunteer for Meals on Wheels. Until recently, he also volunteered in ministry to prisoners. He swims and runs regularly, and does calisthenics every day.

"I like to keep active spiritually, physically, and intellectually," he says. "I would rather work out in the world and be in a number of churches and in classrooms."

A Philadelphia native, Longstreth took a teaching position in 1959 when he first finished his studies at Haverford College. At the time, there were more opportunities for teachers than for clergy.

Eventually, he was ordained in the Episcopal Church and served congregations in the Greater Philadelphia area. He and his wife adopted three children—two daughters and a son—and today his family has grown to include several grandchildren.

"Rev. Longstreth provides a tremendous service for us," says Gina Cooke, director of Manatawny Manor's adult day services

program. "He helps all of us meet the spiritual needs of our clients and residents on a continuing basis, and also assists people here to understand events that challenge us spiritually, such as 9/11 or the death of a client or friend."

Longstreth praises the Manatawny Manor staff for the caring environment they have created. "The service to people here is compassionate and very supportive," he says.

As for the many services he provides others, Longstreth offers a simple explanation: "The Lord has blessed me."

## WISH LIST

Manatawny Manor can use your assistance. If you or your congregation are able to donate any of these items or provide funding for their purchase, please contact Diakon's advancement office at 1-877-342-5667, ext. 1219. Thank you!

- China closet for each dining room
- Avairy
- Treadmill
- Artwork – up to 20 items
- Seasonal altar cloths (two sets)

The following regional memorial and honorary gifts were received from Sept. 23 to Dec. 31, 2004. Diakon programs in the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod thank these donors for their generous gifts.

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**The Rev. Dr. Daun E. McKee, Ph.D.**  
by Members of Diakon's Management Team

*The Retirement of*  
**The Rev. and Mrs. James C. Papada**  
by Mr. and Mrs. Carl Merluzzi

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by The Rev. Daun E. McKee, Ph.D.

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**The Rev. George Stanley Steele**  
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*In Honor of the Birthday of*  
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by Mr. and Mrs. Nicholas A. Phillippides

**Ms. Mollie J. Reinhardt**  
by Mr. and Mrs. William T. Reardon

**Mr. Carl W. Veit - 90th**  
by Dr. and Mrs. Morton Parmet

**Mrs. Hazel S. Wertley - 104th**  
by Ms. Sarah P. Bond

*In Honor of the Anniversary of*  
**Mr. and Mrs. Don Hagge - 60th**  
by Boyertown Area Youth Baseball, Ltd., Mrs. Sheila Specht

**Mrs. Peggy Harlin**  
by Ms. Betty I. Harlin