

Fall 2020

A publication of Diakon
Lutheran Social Ministries
and
Diakon Child, Family
& Community Ministries



DIALOG



Mark Pile to retire; Scott Habecker named CEO

DIAKON WILL HAVE A CHANGE OF LEADERSHIP BEGINNING IN JANUARY.

In mid-September in concert with the Diakon board of directors, Mark T. Pile, MSHA, MSW, Diakon president/CEO since 2010, announced his retirement, effective the end of 2020.

Several weeks later, the board announced the appointment of Scott D. Habecker, CPA, CGMA, currently chief operating officer and chief financial officer, to succeed Pile.

“We were extremely fortunate to have a highly qualified internal candidate who has a clear understanding of the mission and vision of Diakon,” says Larry Delp, board chair. “Scott’s strong leadership skills, coupled with his outstanding financial and strategic abilities, provide the organization with the opportunity to continue building on our strong foundation.”

Delp adds that “Mark’s understanding of our industry and his strategic vision have provided us with a strong position going forward. His dedication to the organization, its staff and to all of the residents and clients we serve has been truly extraordinary. Our boards have been blessed to witness his leadership.”

See Pages 4 and 5 for separate articles on Pile and Habecker.

Our Mission

In response to God's love in Jesus Christ, Diakon will demonstrate God's command to love the neighbor through acts of service.

Diakon: Many Hands, guided by One Heart, transforming the lives of children, families and older adults. With programs ranging from adoption, foster care and at-risk youth services to counseling and comprehensive senior living services, Diakon annually helps thousands of people of all faiths through compassionate service, gracious hospitality and charitable care.

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Mark T. Pile

The President's **DIALOG**

Moving on at a challenging, but right time

THE PANDEMIC HAS CERTAINLY CHANGED

the world of work.

Part of that change, of course, is related to the transition to remote work, for those able to do so, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. As an organization caring for many of our region's most vulnerable people, we do not take lightly any precautions, especially because many of our staff members cannot work remotely and are on the front lines of health care.

As I am certain is true for nearly all of us, there are days I miss the routines of the pre-pandemic world. One aspect of those times was working daily in my office in Old Main on the campus of The Lutheran Home at Topton.

I enjoy the setting so much because when I think back to how the building looked before its complete refurbishment several years ago, I realize again the impact that amazing project had. But that project was also gratifying because the renovation work on Old Main helped to preserve a truly iconic structure, a building with a storied past in the 150-plus-year history of Diakon and one now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In addition, the project created the Helen N. Palmer Center for Permanency for Diakon Adoption & Foster Care. Many people helped to make our vision for Old Main possible, including the late Mrs. Palmer, individual donors, companies and organizations, who were thanked in various ways during our 150th anniversary celebration.

That project was just one among many that have helped to ensure our amazing legacy with the support of donors both internal and external. A brief list of those projects includes the memory support suite at Luther Crest in Allentown, Pennsylvania, the renovation of Diakon Family Life Services' counseling center in Williamsport, the creation of the walking trail at The Lutheran Home at Topton (*profiled elsewhere in this issue*) and extensive renovations and program expansions within Diakon Youth Services, particularly at the Diakon Wilderness Center near Boiling Springs.

As I near the end of my tenure as Diakon's president/CEO, I want to thank everyone who helped to make these and many other projects possible. Your contributions to the organization have truly made a difference in the lives of your neighbors—and to my role as president/CEO.

In some ways, remote work is making the transition to retirement a bit easier. And yet the reason for that remote work—the global pandemic—has certainly made my decision a little disconcerting at times, as if I were leaving in the midst of a crisis.

There is no question 2020 has been a very challenging year, particularly for our staff members caring for residents and clients. We have experienced cases of COVID-19 disease in both our senior living communities and child-and-family programs. And we have lost residents to the novel coronavirus, a fact that saddens us more than you can imagine.

Yet I also knew this was the right moment for my retirement, particularly because of the outstanding leadership team we have in place—and the equally amazing staff members throughout Diakon, in every senior living community, child and family service, community-based program and ministry support.

And so I retire because I know the organization is in excellent hands.

Many Hands, serving with *One Heart*. Just as they have for more than 150 years.

My life is indeed richer for having worked with all of you.

Thank you.

Mark T. Pile, MSHA, MSW
President/CEO

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The beauty of an autumn morning reflects in the pond adjacent to the Topton walking trail. The pond is a picturesque spot where residents may gather for fun, fellowship and fishing. In fact, the pond is designated for resident fishing only!

RESIDENTS, STAFF MEMBERS AND GOVERNMENTAL OFFICIALS RECENTLY PARTICIPATED IN A RIBBON-

cutting for the new walking trail at The Lutheran Home at Topton. Many residents worked on the project for several years. With enhancements supported by donors, Diakon and a Pennsylvania Greenways, Trails and Recreation Program grant, the walking path makes outdoor space accessible to residents who have mobility challenges. The trail leads to a pond, allowing residents and families to enjoy an outdoor setting.



The ribbon is cut, officially opening the walking trail at The Lutheran Home at Topton.



Gathering on the steps of Old Main at The Lutheran Home at Topton before the ribbon-cutting are, from left, Executive Director Debra Gogno, state Rep. Ryan Mackenzie (134) and state Sen. Judy Schwank (11). Both lawmakers provided pivotal support to see the trail project through completion.

Donors have been of significant support to Diakon during the COVID-19 pandemic, both as we respond to the crisis and maintain existing services for those in need. More information about this support will appear in our annual *Donor Report*, to be published in early spring of next year. Thank you!



THIS FALL, A SOPHOMORE AT SAUCON

Valley High School, Hellertown, Pennsylvania, Avia Weber, contacted Diakon about supporting Diakon Adoption & Foster Care. An adoptee from China, Avia had created Love Not Genes Corp. to support adoption processes.

Avia and friends Emma Szydlow and Maggie Chi, shown on right, both of whom serve on her board, assembled backpacks filled with inspirational notes and school supplies to support children served by the adoption and foster care programs. Avia also volunteers with organizations in her local community, lifting up her social impact initiative.



Mark Pile, retiring President/CEO

“IT’S BEEN A TRUE BLESSING TO HAVE SERVED WITH Diakon, particularly when you consider our 150-plus-year history of service and care for people,” says Mark Pile, who will retire as Diakon’s president/CEO the end of 2020.

“Mark personifies the characteristics of a true leader. He leads by example rather than dictate,” a Diakon staff member wrote about Pile in support of his nomination for a nonprofit leadership excellence award.

“Staff members throughout Diakon view him as eminently approachable, as well as a mentor and coach. In dealing with any challenges, he steps back and surveys all of the options available, seeking those that not only will address the situation but also will have the least negative impact on the most people,” the staff member continued.

Pile was appointed president/CEO of Diakon in 2010. Before that, he served as executive vice president/chief operating officer, a role to which he was named at Diakon’s creation in 2000, the result of the affiliation and later merger of Tressler Lutheran Services and Lutheran Services Northeast. Pile was COO of Lutheran Services Northeast.

During Pile’s tenure with the organization, Diakon:

- Successfully completed the integration of two large social ministry organizations to become one of the larger Lutheran service organizations in the country.
- Provided \$1 million to \$1.6 million a month in charitable care.
- Had an annual community benefit—the impact beyond direct service—of approximately \$20 million.
- Served hundreds of thousands of people of all ages.
- Completed the refurbishment of Old Main, a historic structure on The Lutheran Home at Topton campus, along with establishment of the Helen N. Palmer Center for Permanency in the building, enhancing Diakon Adoption & Foster Care operations.
- Adjusted the scope and size of its senior living communities and community programs to make sure the organization remains sustainable and a market leader.
- Created the “sister” organization of Diakon Child, Family & Community Ministries to guarantee a focus on community-based services for children, youths and families. Given a “pause” related to the COVID-19 pandemic, this step allowed previous financial subsidies to be used for other purposes including exploration of programming for unmet community needs.
- Improved recruitment and reduced employee turnover and nursing-agency usage, while working to develop effective strategies to retain staff.
- Successfully marked the organization’s 150th anniversary with a year-long celebration.

A board member summarizes the last 11 years under Pile’s leadership: “I watched Mark Pile take the reins of the Diakon organization and make careful adjustments that focused its services on what we would call its core ministries. This process was deliberative and while focused on coping with the financial challenges that most non-profit social service organizations experience, it always kept those we serve at the forefront.

“This focus on the well-being of others is a hallmark of Mark’s tenure as Diakon CEO, as well as during his earlier work as chief operating officer.”

In recognition of his accomplishments, Pile early this year received the Leadership Excellence Award in the Central Penn Business Journal’s annual Nonprofit Innovation Awards. The award is given for significant contributions in multiple areas of nonprofit operations, including response and adaptation to a changing society; collaboration with other organizations,



boards of directors, staff and other key partners; enhanced service delivery; innovative thinking; and increased organizational transparency and accountability.

In 2013, he received the Distinguished Alumni Award for Social Work Practice from the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work, an award acknowledging and honoring a social work alumnus or alumna who, throughout his or her career, has consistently demonstrated exceptional contributions to the profession and the community at large.

According to a school official, “The university is proud to honor Mark not only for his many years of outstanding performance as a professional social worker, but also for the honor he has brought us as one of our most distinguished alumni.”

Service to others is nothing new to Pile.

He joined Lutheran Services Northeast as senior vice president in 1997, overseeing that organization’s operations in 14 eastern Pennsylvania counties. Before that, he served as vice president of Somerset Hospital, a non-profit, 150-bed community hospital in western Pennsylvania. He also has served as CEO of Twin Lakes Center, a Somerset non-profit drug and alcohol treatment service.

Pile’s history of service extends to the community as well. He was chairman of the steering committee and a founder of the Somerset Area Food Pantry and a former board member of Meals on Wheels of Somerset County and of Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries, Hollidaysburg, serving as board vice-chair. He also is a past president of the Somerset Exchange Club.

A 1974 graduate of Lycoming College in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, he earned his Master of Science in Social Work degree from the University of Pittsburgh; he also holds a Master of Science degree in Health Administration from the Medical College of Virginia in Richmond.

Pile is a son of the late Richard R. and Ruth Z. Pile of Friedens, Pennsylvania. Married to Susan Pile, he has six grown children and six grandchildren.

“I was part of the birthing of Diakon,” Pile says, “and have been part of its entire existence. Having the opportunity to serve with wonderful board members and committed staff and leadership has been truly a gift I will always cherish. I have so enjoyed interacting with and serving those who have come to Diakon in need of care and service.”

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Scott Habecker, new Diakon president/CEO

SCOTT D. HABECKER, DIAKON'S CURRENT CHIEF operating and chief financial officer, was a natural choice to succeed Mark Pile as Diakon president/CEO, notes the chairman of the Diakon board of directors.

“Scott has been very successful in overseeing and guiding both financial and operational realms within Diakon, producing a number of significant and positive outcomes for the organization,” says Larry Delp.

“Moreover, he has given nearly a dozen years of service to Diakon, a tenure that enables him to understand our challenge and opportunities, setting the stage for successful continuation of our historic mission.”

A Certified Public Accountant and Chartered Global Management Accountant, Habecker joined the organization in mid-2009 as vice president for planning and business development. He was named chief operating officer the end of 2012, acquiring the chief financial role in early 2014.

“I am both excited and humbled by the opportunity to lead such an exemplary organization in fulfilling its mission to serve people in need,” Habecker says.

“I have an incredible amount of respect for the outstanding group of board members and Diakon team members with whom I have the pleasure of working every day. Without them and the residents, patients and clients we serve, I recognize this opportunity would never be possible.”

He has special appreciation for Pile, “who has provided me with endless opportunities and support that have helped to pave the way for this opportunity.”

“Scott’s financial acumen and strategic-planning ability will serve the organization extremely well,” Pile notes. “I fully expect Scott’s tenure to reflect an emphasis on sound growth in alignment with our heritage and mission.”

As chief operating and financial officer, Habecker has led or worked on numerous initiatives focused on strengthening Diakon services. Among those, he:

- Helped to create a strategic plan focused on enhancing quality outcomes across the organization, while also improving financial sustainability and efficiency.
- Established programmatic leadership teams with broad capabilities and expertise to execute that strategic plan and its initiatives.
- Achieved improvements in senior living cash flows of nearly \$10 million annually during a five-year period while improving overall quality measurements on the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services 5-Star system.
- Helped to lead the 2014 creation of Diakon Child, Family & Community Ministries. The restructuring, which included the creation of a separate board of directors, resulted in years of positive cash flows, a significant change for that line of business.
- Oversaw significant renovation and expansion projects across various senior living campuses.
- Completed numerous financing transactions, including bond issues and refinancing initiatives, to enhance growth efforts and debt-service reductions.
- Led efforts to determine and evaluate potential programmatic acquisitions and divestitures, including valuation, due-diligence coordination and quality analyses.

Before joining Diakon, Habecker spent nine years as chief financial officer for a multi-state, long-term care pharmacy business, during which he helped to complete five acquisitions. Prior to that, he held successive



Both Mark Pile and Scott Habecker actively support Diakon's services. Some years ago (opposite page), Mark Pile participated in Giving Tuesday by climbing the high-elements ropes course at the Diakon Wilderness Center. Above: Scott Habecker takes part in the Hershey Half-Marathon, raising funds for Diakon.

roles as director of finance, assistant controller and corporate controller for Presbyterian Senior Living, Dillsburg, Pennsylvania. He began his career in the Harrisburg office of Ernst & Young, an international accounting and auditing firm.

A graduate of Elizabethtown College with a bachelor's degree in accounting, Habecker received a 2006 Central Penn Business Journal Forty under 40 Award; the annual award recognizes 40 regional business leaders for their commitment to business growth, professional excellence and their communities.

Habecker and his wife, Jenny, have two daughters.



For Sarah Riemondi, Topton was ‘The Way to Go Home’

AS A RESIDENT OF THE LUTHERAN HOME AT TOPTON, Sarah (Schlegel) Riemondi loved to sing the 1925 song “Show Me the Way to Go Home.”

The song may have been a favorite because coming to live at the senior living community was truly a return home for her—she had served as a teacher at the site when it was an orphanage.

Mrs. Riemondi, 106, passed away this fall at The Lutheran Home at Topton, the place where she made many happy memories and left the legacy of a joyful personality.

“Sarah is the woman I want to be when I grow up—always grateful and loved by everyone here,” noted the Rev. Dr. Colleen Kristula, chaplain, at a graveside service.

A native and long-time resident of nearby Fleetwood, Mrs. Riemondi began teaching at the Topton orphanage in 1934 and was there until at least 1942, the year of her wedding to 2nd Lt. George Riemondi before he left for North Africa.

“My understanding is that she taught until her son, Dan, was born,” Kristula says, adding that the woman taught kindergarten and first and third grades at various times during her tenure at the children’s home.

“Our social worker’s interview with her on admission to the senior living community notes that she taught kindergarten for 12 years in a room in what is now the Buehrle Personal Care Center. That same room later became her suite when she moved here in 2002!” the chaplain says. Mrs. Riemondi relocated to skilled nursing in 2013 following a hip injury.

The Lutheran Home at Topton opened as an orphanage in 1896 but began to expand services to older adults in the 1940s. On-site care for children—a predecessor to today’s Diakon Adoption & Foster Care—ended in the mid-1970s.

Born in November 1913, Sarah was the daughter of the late George and Sally (Merkel) Schlegel. She was a member of the Fleetwood High School class of 1930 and a lifelong member of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church in the same Berks County community. During her high school years, she played basketball and baseball and participated in church activities and Luther League.

After graduating from Kutztown State Teacher’s College (now Kutztown University), she embarked on her teaching career at Topton, a career that concluded at Earl Township Elementary School in the Boyertown School District, where she taught for 19 years.



Sarah and George Riemondi, center, back row, celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary in Fleetwood in 1992 with, from left, front, Sarah’s sisters Esther, Mabel, Arlene and Leah, with granddaughter Angela Riemondi, daughter of Dan and Regina Riemondi, on their laps; rear, Nick, Regina, Dan and Wes Riemondi.

Top of Page 7: The Schlegel family gathers in front of the family home in Fleetwood in 1918. From left are, front, Leah, Sarah and Arlene Schlegel; back, Mabel Schlegel, mother Sally (Merkel) Schlegel, brother Daniel Schlegel, father George Schlegel and Esther Schlegel. Fleetwood was celebrating its 50th anniversary and the family had just moved into their new home, completed in 1917.

Dan Riemondi and his wife, Regina, live in Texas but were blessed to be able to spend the last four days of Sarah's life visiting her every day.

He recalls how his mother would ride the trolley from Fleetwood to Topton, then walk to the top of the hill—Home Avenue—and then to the building where she taught. "Sometimes, the kids offered to give her a ride on their sleds down the hill to the trolley station." Her husband's sister owned The Oley Valley Hotel at the time and Sarah would sometimes help as a server on weekends.

Sarah loved living at Topton in her later years. "She wanted to move there and buy a cottage when my dad was still alive," says Dan, but "it was no contest for dad; he wanted to stay in their house." George Riemondi passed away in 2000.

"They used to call her Mayor of the Buehrle Center," he says. "She enjoyed the people and the surroundings."

Loni Boyer, a nursing manager, notes that when asked what her secret to longevity was, Sarah replied: "I ate a peanut butter sandwich and drank a rum and Coke every day." Dan chuckles at the remembrance. "That sounds right and my Mom liked that peanut butter sandwich dipped in hot cocoa!"

Sarah's entire family, which includes three grandchildren and five great-grandchildren, gathered for her 100th birthday in 2013. Unfortunately, she injured her hip the night before, so the family celebrated in her room at a local hospital. Eventually, notes Dan, "Mom's memory began to fade."

Sarah's sister, Arlene, lived with her in the Buehrle Center for a year but passed away at just over 100 year of age. Interestingly, Sarah and Lester Hoch—the two last living classmates of Fleetwood High School's Class of 1930—both lived at Topton at the same time.

"Sarah was so proud to live at Topton," says Tabetha Oldt of the Topton staff. "She enjoyed being outdoors when she lived in Buehrle, walking around the garden looking at the flowers and sun-bathing."

Another staff member, Cindy Weber, remembers that when visitors arrived with children, "Sarah would always go and talk to the children and talk to them as if she was their teacher. I always thought that was cute."

When Sarah passed away, her family asked that contributions be made to the Carillon Fund in her memory.

"She loved the hymns that it played," says Kristula.

It didn't matter that those selections did not include "Show Me the Way to Go Home." She was already there.



Son Dan Riemondi and his wife, Regina, visit with his mother, Sarah, on her 100th birthday in 2013.



The Herald, published by the orphanage, includes an article on Sarah's 1942 wedding.



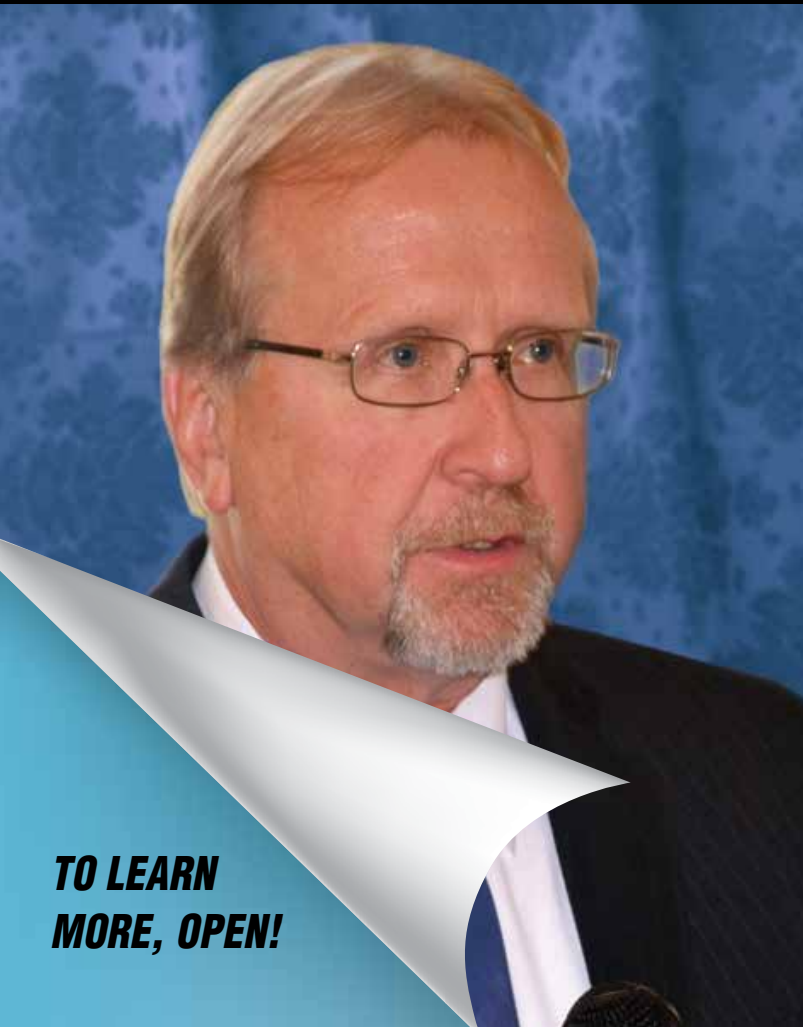
Sarah's five great-grandchildren help celebrate Sarah's 100th birthday in 2013. From left are Aubree Scott; Rhys Riemondi; Navin Riemondi held by his father, Nick Riemondi; Olivia Scott; and Knox Riemondi. Each family group made Sarah a 100th birthday gift, a necklace with 100 beads, a crown with 100 jewels, a treasure box, a scrapbook and plenty of drawings.



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Diakon president/CEO to retire; successor appointed



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