

DIALOG

A publication of Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries

Summer/Fall 2010

Spirit of giving grew in an orphanage many years ago

■ One Christmas at the Topton Orphans Home, Nancy Erdman received a gift.

It was the only gift she received for Christmas that year, but it was something she didn't need, so she gave it to someone she thought needed it more. Although the matron at the home scolded her, Erdman knew she had done the right thing.

This story has been repeated throughout Erdman's life as she has selflessly given her time and energy to countless charities, organizations, and individuals. For her lifelong commitment to helping others, she recently was presented with the Lehigh County Unsung Heroes award, one of nine members of Senior Corps RSVP who were honored.

Diane Schrameyer, director of Diakon-sponsored Senior Corps RSVP in Lehigh, Northampton, and Carbon counties, nominated Erdman for the award. The local program has more than 800 volunteers.

"Nancy has been blessed with the ability to see needs all around her and in turn becomes a blessing to those in need," says Schrameyer. "Some people believe that those who volunteer do so because life has been very good to them—that they're coming from a place of abundance. What most of us would see as hardship and challenge, Nancy sees as a blessing and has developed a generous spirit that reaches out to help others."

Erdman's blessing was obvious from a very young age, despite the hardships she faced from birth. She was in the hospital for the first three months of her life when her mother suddenly passed away. Erdman and her youngest brother went to live at the Topton children's home.

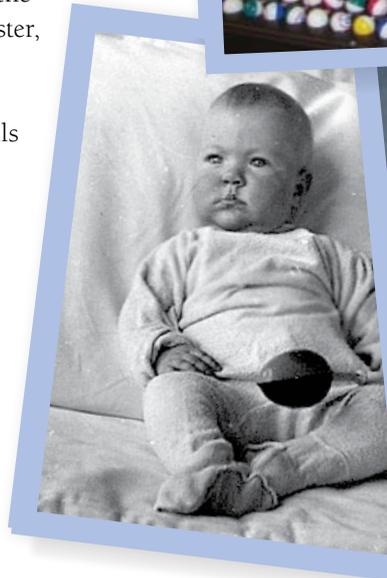
"They had a great interest in kids. They wanted to take care of us," says Erdman. "People were always there for me."

Erdman was fortunate to have had many caring people in her life, both at the home and within her extended family. Her Aunt Mary, her mother's oldest sister, ultimately interested Erdman in volunteering.

Like her aunt, Erdman has spent her life helping others. As a Senior Corps RSVP member, Erdman volunteers for countless organizations including Meals on Wheels of Lehigh County, Cedarbrook County Nursing Home, and Cedar View Apartments. She also participates in two RSVP-administered programs, Pen Pals and Books without Words. In Pen Pals, Erdman exchanges monthly letters with a student at a local elementary school; for Books without Words, she helps to create books for people with Alzheimer's disease.

Erdman maintains a hectic schedule, volunteering more than 50 hours a month. At the age of 76, she hasn't considered slowing down because she knows there are so many people who count on her.

"We all have a purpose for being here and I feel the need to give back for all that has been mine," says Erdman. "There is always something to do for someone. If I can help, why shouldn't I?" ■



OUR MISSION

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

Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries is a leading provider of senior living accommodations and social services, including adoption, counseling, home care, and youth programs in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Delaware. With many hands and one heart, Diakon staff members each year touch the lives of more than half-a-million children, families, and older adults. We are proud to continue a nearly-150-year tradition of hospitality and care for people of all faiths.

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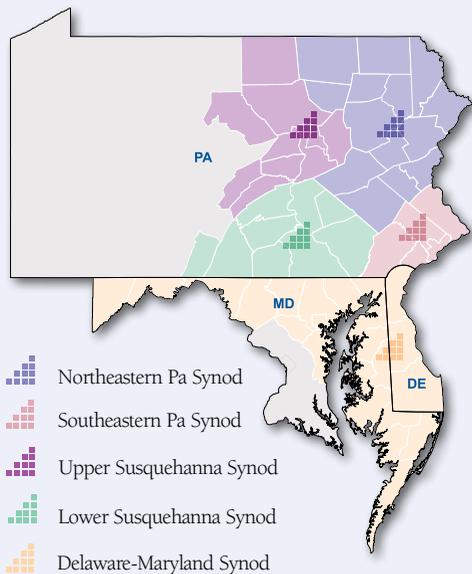
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Attic holds treasures of days gone by

When you were a child—when all the world seemed new—the smallest object was often a thing of wonder. You may feel like that child again discovering the treasures in Grandma's Attic at Twining Village, a Diakon Lutheran Senior Living Community in Holland, Pa.

Thanks to the hard work of many volunteers, the Attic, which offers items from Christmas gifts to toys and tables, has been raising funds for activities coordinated by the Twining Village Residents Association since its inception in 1981. Items for sale are donated by Twining residents or made by them in the craft room or carpentry shop.

Grandma's Attic occupies several rooms in the basement of Twining Manor, with items such as furniture, knick-knacks, and even plants available for purchase Mondays from 10 a.m. to noon; the Attic is open to residents, employees, and the public. In addition, a Christmas Bazaar is held in November and a mini-bazaar in April.

"Our best customers are our Twining employees who come visit us every Monday," says Ruth Seelig, who co-chairs Grandma's Attic along with Ruth Nuss. "Since I became involved in 2000, the Attic has really grown by leaps and bounds; we have enlisted a number of volunteers who assist with pricing, tagging, arranging items on display, and helping out during our sale days."

In 2009, Grandma's Attic raised more than \$16,000, donated to the residents association. Funds are allocated for weekly entertainment for residents.

Seelig not only co-chairs Grandma's Attic, but also chairs the village recreation committee. "I have incentive to sell because I can then go and spend it on the great entertainment for our residents," explains Seelig. "It's a win-win situation."

Within the three rooms of Grandma's Attic are hundreds of items, many of which might "tell tales" from days past. "When you stroll through our sale rooms, you feel as if you have stepped into your grandma's house, filled with memories and love," Seelig says. "It is a wonderful place to volunteer." ■



From left, Ruth Nuss, co-chair, Shirley Reichert, volunteer, and Ruth Seelig, co-chair, show off several items available at Grandma's Attic.

Resident shares more than a century of memories

When you've marked more than 100 birthdays, it may be difficult to find something to make the celebration a little different. Sophie Voynar found that recently by enjoying the event three times with three different parties.

"It is nice to be fussed over," smiles Voynar, a resident of Manatawny Manor, a Diakon Lutheran Senior Living Community in Pottstown, Pa. Her family, friends, and church members helped her mark the milestone of birthday 105 in late April.

How many of those parties, held over the course of more than a century, stand out for her?

"On my fifth birthday, we had our picture taken as a family," recalls the native of tiny Kaska, Pa., near Pottsville. "That was a big deal."

Voynar readily relates stories from growing up in Pennsylvania's mining country—how she attended a one-room school, completing roughly six grades, and how she first went to work at age 14 at a Pottsville hotel, washing glasses and setting tables. She walked to her job two miles each way.

One of eight children—four boys and four girls—and the oldest daughter, Voynar spent a lot of time playing with her brothers and their friends. But there were some things they didn't let her do, illustrating the life of a female in the early 1900s.

"I gave money toward the purchase of a family car, but never drove it," she says. "My brothers said that girls don't drive."

She heard the same thing when she pestered them to teach her card games; girls don't play cards, they told her.

Voynar has seen amazing technological changes over her lifetime, particularly in technology. Some of those changes and improvements she embraced—microwave ovens and color televisions—but others didn't interest her at all. "My son tried to get me on a computer," she says, "but I didn't go for it."

Contrasting the cost of things today to prices in her youth also illustrates vast changes. She recalls bread costing five cents a loaf, the family car just \$800. Her job at the Pottsville hotel paid \$4 a week.

Of course, living so long has meant living through many loses. She has outlived both her husband and her son. Some of her siblings and all of the friends she grew up with are gone.

But Voynar has had much happiness, too. She's proud of being a "working girl" all her life and of her many hours volunteering after she retired, helping in the pharmacy at Pottstown Medical Center and reading to kindergartners at local schools.

Although she never did learn to drive, she became fairly skilled at several card games. Of course, everyone asks for the secret to longevity and Voynar offers a simple answer: "I worked hard all my life." ❖

Residents of senior living communities may become concerned about outliving their financial resources. But at Diakon, each resident receives a promise—a promise that ensures that residents who have exhausted their financial resources through circumstances beyond their control or whose cost of care exceeds reimbursement, are able to receive continued housing, care, and support services for the rest of their lives within our senior living communities. Each year Diakon provides more than a million dollars a month in benevolent care. To learn more about Diakon's Benevolent Care Promise, or to join the group of dedicated and generous donors that help Diakon keep this promise, visit www.diakon.org.



Sophie Voynar celebrates her 105th birthday with balloons and a special cake. Her younger brother, Stanley, 90, below, attended the festivities.



Runner fulfills personal dreams while supporting young girls

■ Katie Visco has inspired girls all over the United States to discover their passions and “run”—literally—after them.

That’s exactly what Visco did.

Upon graduating from college in 2007, Visco didn’t want to do what she thought was expected of her. Instead, she followed her heart and worked with inner-city high school students as a volunteer with a non-profit group. It was a life-changing experience. “I saw how much of a positive effect I had on those kids,” says Visco. “They needed a role model and I was it.”

That experience, along with her passion for running, motivated her to follow her dream to be the youngest female to run across America. As she made her way from Boston to San Diego, Visco raised money for one of her favorite charities, Girls on the Run.

A nationwide running-based prevention program for girls in third through eighth grades, Girls on the Run instills self-respect and strong values through health education, life-skills development, mentoring, and physical training.

“The program focuses on three core areas—learning about oneself, working with others, and giving back to the community,” explains Michelle McElwee, clinical director for Diakon Family Life Services – Upper Susquehanna, Williamsport. “Girls are taught to feel good not just about how they look, but who they are on the inside, too.”

Visco’s cross-country itinerary involved



Katie Visco, second from right, visits the Cochran Elementary school Girls on the Run group in Williamsport, Pa.

speaking engagements at schools and Girls on the Run programs, including two schools in Lycoming County and programs in Allentown, sponsored by Diakon Family Life Services – Northeastern Pennsylvania.

In Williamsport, Visco realized once again how much of an impact she has on young people.

“I asked the girls what excites them, what their passions are,” she says. “One little girl looked up at me and said, ‘Katie, you are the only person in my life that has followed their dream.’”

As Visco ran, people of all ages supported and rallied around her. People in the streets cheered for her as she went by and strangers jogged with her, providing her with much-needed encouragement.

“Two ladies on the GOTR advisory council ran with her,” says McElwee. “They wanted to do something to support her along the way.”

McElwee wanted to do something to help support Visco, too. Knowing Visco stayed in the homes of friends and strangers as she made her way across the nation, McElwee offered her home as a safe haven for the night. “As a parent, I knew I had to help her out,” says McElwee. “I knew her parents would wonder where she would sleep and whether she was safe.”

In the end, Visco raised and donated \$11,000 to several Girls on the Run chapters, including the Diakon programs in Lycoming and Lehigh counties—as well as GOTR councils in Indiana and Kansas City. The funds donated to the Pennsylvania chapters are restricted to scholarships and supplies, two of several areas in which donations are desperately needed.

“The economy has forced us to cut back to figure out what we can do with the money we have,” says McElwee. “In addition to monetary support, donations of healthy snacks and water, curriculum supplies, and volunteers are needed.”

Visco fulfilled her dream when her year-long journey came to an end as she reached San Diego in December. But the effect she has had on countless lives continues with girls nationwide.

“Katie positively inspired the girls she met to achieve their dreams and feel confident in themselves,” says McElwee. ■

💡 GOTR strives to instill self-respect and strong values in young women through life skills development, mentoring relationships, and physical training. Parents, schools, volunteers, staff members, and the community work together to help the girls achieve these goals. More information on the program is available on the Web at www.diakon.org/gotr. A number of regional sponsors help to support the local programs and additional support is always welcome.



Photo by Jenny Sadler



Photo by Rob Winner

Old friends reclaim their pasts through a game of bingo

■ ■ ■ It wasn't a bottle of lotion or perfume that Pauline Zaptic and Mary Campbell won during a game of bingo, it was friendship—plus lots of memories.

Zaptic and Campbell are residents of Frey Village, a Diakon Lutheran Senior Living Community in Middletown, Pa. The women met recently during a game of bingo and realized they shared more than “B-19.”

“As soon as I saw Mary, I recognized her as someone I knew,” recalls Zaptic.

“She said, ‘I know a Mary Bolton’ and I said, ‘I am Mary Bolton, but I’m Mary Campbell now,’” Campbell says.

As it turns out, Zaptic, 91, and Campbell, 88, grew up near each other in Hummelstown. “I graduated with her brother, Robert,” Zaptic says. “Her sister, Mary, was in my class,” Campbell adds.

Campbell says she hadn't seen Zaptic—whose maiden name was Rige—since 1939. “Mary looked the same,” Zaptic said.

“I’ll take that as a compliment,” Campbell replies with a grin.

As the women compared notes, they realized they had a lot in common. “We remembered different things that happened, where our homes were and how we knew each other,” Zaptic says. “Hummelstown was just a small town and you knew everybody.”

Neither Zaptic nor Campbell strayed too far from their hometown. “My husband, George, got a job at Bethlehem Steel,” Zaptic says.

“My husband, William, worked at Harrisburg Steel. They were at different steel companies,” Campbell says.

Zaptic and her husband raised three sons and now have several grandchildren, while Campbell and her spouse reared a son and a daughter and now have three grandsons. “I’m still waiting for a great-grandchild,” Campbell says with a chuckle.

The women share smiles as they recall the past, while also catching up. “Do you remember Miss Price?” Campbell asks. “She taught 50 years.”

“She started teaching first grade and kept going,” Zaptic recalls.

“They named Price Elementary after her,” Campbell notes.

“School was different back then. We didn’t have rowdy kids like nowadays,” Zaptic says.

“I always told my children, ‘If you get in trouble in school, you’re in big trouble when you get home,’” Campbell says. “It’s not that way today.”

“I think it’s harder to raise kids today,” Zaptic says. “They have too much stuff to go to—soccer and ball practice. I think it was easier years ago to raise children.”

As Zaptic and Campbell wax nostalgic, they note, however, that it’s hard to outlive your spouse and move away from a familiar home and neighborhood.

But thanks to the many activities available, the women have made friends at Frey Village. “We have a really good activities department and staff who try to keep everyone busy and having a good life,” says Tracy Klein, activities director. “We actually find a lot of people here who know each other.”

The two women still regularly play bingo. “I win most of the time,” Zaptic grins. “I’ve won a couple of times,” counters Campbell.

But prizes such as shower gel and stuffed animals pale in comparison to the friendship the women won in that first game. That prize lasts a lifetime. ■ ■ ■



DIALOG DIGEST

Six students recently graduated from the Diakon Flight Program. Based at the Diakon Wilderness Center in Boiling Springs, Pa., and initially partly funded by a grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Health, the voluntary program is for former students of wilderness center programs and others who seek continuing mentoring and support to become successful, productive citizens. Brandon Kelbaugh, Chris Skates, James Martin, John Reaser, Steven Reid, and Thomas Kemper were the members of the first graduating class.



A blessing and dedication recently launched a free dental clinic at Christ Lutheran Church, Harrisburg, Pa., in the economically challenged Allison Hill neighborhood. The only one of its kind in Cumberland, Dauphin, Perry, and Adams counties in Pennsylvania, the clinic is a collaboration of members of the construction community, faith-based communities, and the Harrisburg Area Dental Society. Diakon provided a first-year grant of \$25,000 to assist with establishment of the clinic. While Diakon offers a range of social services requiring grants and other contributions, the organization is able to use some internal resources to enhance congregational social ministry. Such resources, not acquired through grants or recent contributions, are funds designated to support the work of local congregations.

Several Diakon Wilderness Center students visited earlier this year with employees of Members 1st Federal Credit Union in Mechanicsburg, Pa., to experience the inner workings of a business. By spending time with senior management, students had the opportunity to look at skills necessary to do various jobs as well as to consider possible opportunities in similar fields.

Thrivent Financial for Lutherans is launching a new charitable-grant fraternal funding program called Thrivent Choicesm. Through this program, Choice Dollarssm will be designated to some Thrivent Financial members. As always, Diakon is grateful for your consideration when you make charitable giving plans. If you are a Thrivent Financial member and learn that you will be eligible to direct Choice Dollars, we ask you please to consider Diakon as you help direct Thrivent Financial's charitable funds. Thrivent members will receive additional information by mail from Thrivent. For information on how you can join Thrivent, readers may go to www.thrivent.com.

A rededication ceremony was held in late spring at Luther Crest, a Diakon Lutheran Senior Living Community in Allentown, Pa. Celebrating the renovation of the community's senior living offer were residents, staff, and special guests from Luther Crest's 27-year history. A Luther Crest resident and employees who have been part of the campus since its beginning and Bishop Samuel Zeiser of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America helped to celebrate Diakon's commitment to seniors.

Diakon Youth Services was recently awarded a contract to operate an evening reporting center for youths in Lancaster, Pa. A partnership was established with St. Paul's United Methodist Church in the city to lease space in which to operate the program, named Turning Point. The program will serve 10 youths at a time for an approximate 40-day period as an alternate to detention.

The Diakon-operated Brandywine Program in Delaware recently received accreditation by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities, an independent, non-profit accrediting organization of human service providers in the areas of aging services, behavioral health, child and youth services, employment and community services, medical rehabilitation, and several other fields. Two Brandywine Program services—crisis intervention mental health and intensive outpatient treatment—were accredited for a three-year period.

DIAKON SOCIAL MEDIA

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Young man gives up birthday gifts to help children in need



Angel Gring-Vazquez with some of the backpacks and duffel bags collected at his party.

■ A green garbage bag held all his possessions. The clothes in the bag were old and tattered. He wasn't homeless. He was Angel, a young boy on his way to live with yet another foster family.

As he moved from foster home to foster home, the trash bag went with him.

"When I was younger, I didn't realize how bad it was, but I realize it now. No one wants to move around with garbage bags," says Angel Gring-Vazquez of Spring Township, Berks County, Pa. So he recently did something to keep other youths from experiencing what he did.

Gring-Vazquez recently celebrated his 16th birthday with a party, but with a selfless twist. Instead of bringing gifts for Angel, guests were asked to contribute a backpack or duffel bag. Thanks to the support he received from his guests and countless community organizations and businesses, Gring-Vazquez will ultimately supply more than 150 bags for children and youths served by Diakon Adoption & Foster Care.

Gring-Vazquez began formulating the idea for the party several years ago when he was asked to speak to local congregations about foster care.

"Angel talked about how his clothing was transferred seven times as he moved from house to house. Angel got sad and emotional," explains Ted Vazquez, Angel's parent. "When the time came, he wanted to do something to give back. It was Angel's dream to collect the bags for Diakon."

The bags will be used for children entering care through Diakon Adoption & Foster Care and when they leave care. They will also be used when the children go on vacation.

"This will mean a lot to our children to have something to put

their possessions in," says Kathy Roach, a director with the program's Topton office. "No more

trash bags for children coming and leaving care. Because so many bags were collected, there will be one for every child."

Angel and his older brother, Tino, were adopted through Diakon Adoption & Foster Care by the Gring-Vazquez family in 2005.

Without his adoptive family, Gring-Vazquez doesn't think he would "have made it very far" in life. "The path I was going down was leading me nowhere," says Gring-Vazquez. "I had no one to look up to, no father-figure and no one to tell me what was good and bad."

Now, he says, he has a family who has set him on the right path, that has given him stability, direction and love. "I can't ask for more love than I have," says Gring-Vazquez.

His family has made so much of an impact on him that when he grows up, he wants to adopt children. "I want to make sure that kids don't have the life I had," he says. "Adopting children and setting them on the right path is the way to go."

When Angel was 9 years old, he told his caseworker, "You have the coolest job in world. You make families." Now, he has a permanent family and is helping other children find their forever homes—with new luggage in tow. ■

♥ For more information on how you can help support programs such as Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, please visit www.diakon.org or call 1-877-DIAKON-7.

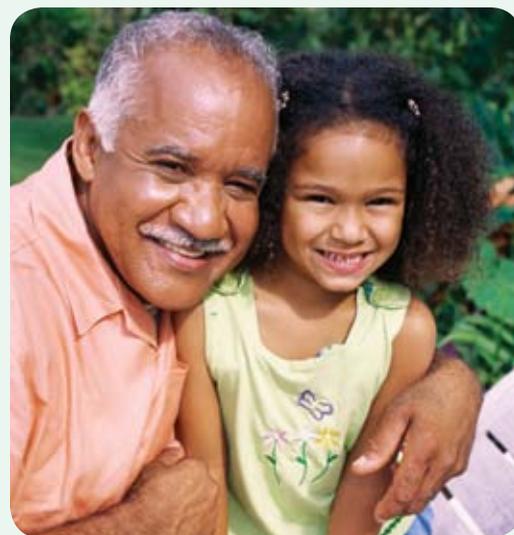
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♥ In 2010, Diakon will provide approximately \$14 million in benevolent care to the people we serve. We need your continued support to provide that level of care to people in your community with limited financial resources.

Most of the Diakon services depicted in *Dialog* provide benevolent care in a variety of ways. Diakon depends now more than ever on generous donations from corporations, synods, congregations, and individuals to enable it to serve so many people.

You can join us in making a difference in the lives of people in need. Simply use the blue envelope in this issue of *Dialog* or log onto our Web site's convenient and secure donation form to make your gift.

For further information on how you can support one or more of Diakon's ministries, please call the Office of Advancement at 1-877-DIAKON-7, option 2, extension 21219, or visit www.diakon.org. Thank you.



Resident helps save lives and the environment one vial at a time

■ Kay Felmeth has always made a difference at Twining Village.

The resident of the Diakon Lutheran Senior Living Community in Bucks County, Pa., has volunteered and also served on numerous committees since coming to live at Twining Village 24 years ago.

During that time, she has served as president of the Residents Association, established the Religious Concerns Committee, and been active with food drives and the Christmas “mitten tree.”

Recently, Felmeth spotted an article in her son’s church newsletter about MedShare, an organization that provides medical supplies to underserved populations. She immediately began to think about how she might help.

With assistance from the pharmacy at the community’s Wellness Center, Felmeth and a group of volunteers now send much-needed pill vials to the organization every month. MedShare then distributes the vials to places such as Haiti, Honduras, Ecuador, The Sudan, and Uganda, depending on

volunteers such as Felmeth to get these life-saving supplies to people who need them.

“I started this project in June of 2007 and sent out 700 pill vials that year,” says Felmeth. “With more volunteers, in 2008 we were able to send 3,000 and in 2009 we sent 5,000.”

The process of preparing the vials for mailing is a bit laborious, but Felmeth doesn’t complain. Once a week she heads to the Wellness Center to pick up the vials, then distributes them among her volunteers. Next is the process of cleaning the vials, drying them, packaging them in boxes donated by Twining Village, and transporting them to the post office.

“Knowing that we are helping doctors somewhere providing care to those whose lives depend on these supplies is a wonderful feeling,” said Felmeth. “At the same time, we are keeping our environment clean by reducing waste. It is a real humanitarian effort and those of us at Twining are proud to be a part of it.” ■



Kay Felmeth displays a basket of pill bottles collected from residents of Twining Village.



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