



DIALOG

Diakon prepares to celebrate 150 years of service

THERE WILL NEED TO BE A LOT OF CANDLES ON the cake. 150, to be precise!

That's because, next year, Diakon will celebrate its 150th anniversary, its century-and-a-half birthday. We have a lot planned to mark the anniversary, including ...

- The celebration-opening dedication of a major refurbishment and renovation project in Old Main on The Lutheran Home at Topton campus (*see the article on Page 3*).
- Local events at Diakon Senior Living communities and Diakon Child, Family & Community Ministries programs.
- An end-of-celebration event featuring a national speaker.
- Publication of history-related materials, creation of a video and much more, with additional details to come in next year's first issue of *Dialog*.

Diakon's earliest official roots date to Jan. 6, 1868, when the Perry County, Pennsylvania, Court granted a charter for a corporation to be known as the "Tressler Orphans Home of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the United States of America." The Lutheran church completed its purchase of the Loysville property—a classical academy-turned-Civil War orphanage—from the Tressler family Feb. 20 of that year. Purchase price: \$5,000.

The Rev. Philip Willard, who envisioned the church-operated children's home, negotiated its purchase and raised funds for its initial operation, was 59 when he became the Tressler home's superintendent, a position he held until he was 80.

At 47, the Rev. Uriah P. Heilman was slightly younger than Willard when—in 1896—he assumed superintendence of the planned "Lutheran

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Paul Herring, right, portrays the Rev. Philip Willard, who purchased the Tressler Orphans Home for the Lutheran church, in a video being developed for Diakon's 150th anniversary. Accompanying him, seated left, are Jim Clark, who plays Daniel Eppley, Willard's attorney from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and Ed Duffy, who portrays both the carriage driver and John Tressler in the brief production. The scenes were shot in Gettysburg the fall of 2017.

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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The President's DIALOG



Mark T. Pile

A long—and often change-filled—history of service

AS I CONDUCTED MY ANNUAL "state-of-the-union" visits to Diakon program sites and senior living communities this year, two key themes arose in my discussions: Our upcoming 150th anniversary and "change."

For some reason, those two themes seem incongruous. Celebrating major birthdays is a constant in life and in many ways reflects stability and consistency, as do our faith-based heritage and staff's commitment to serve.

Yet when we look back over 150 years, as we are doing with our upcoming anniversary, there is, well, a bit of change to be found. Here are just a few brief examples:

- A children's home, seeing society gradually reduce the need for orphanages, begins to serve at-risk children and youths in their homes, in the community.
- A children's home, very early in the 1900s, sets aside funds for the eventual creation of an "old folks" home because leaders envision growing needs at that end of the age-spectrum.
- Our youth services program, long providing residential care in a wilderness setting, ends that service in response to a greater county focus on community-based programs.
- Senior living communities see their annual patient and resident numbers rise dramatically as the health-care industry shifts to short-term rehabilitation and an emphasis on returning people to their homes as quickly as possible.

So perhaps the only thing that has truly changed over those many years in regard to change is the speed at which change now occurs.

In fact, I focused on that speed during my recent presentations, outlining the rapid changes that continue to refine, and even disrupt, the world of health care: hospital mergers, continuing evolution of payment systems, the higher acuity levels of care required by patients and residents, the 5-star rating system employed by the federal government to rank nursing care centers. And those are just the changes occurring in senior living; similar shifts affect our child and family programs.

All of these changes, and more, have had significant effects on the way we operate. Yet, as we have done over the last 150 years, we have adapted to those transitions and, in many cases, kept ahead of those shifts.

As a result, I describe in my presentations two of the key areas on which we remain focused:

- Being present at the table when health-care changes occur or networks develop.
- Being a leader in such efforts as established performance metrics, not only in senior living but also in child and family programs that, traditionally, have not measured their efficacy.

That commitment, I believe, will help to ensure our tradition of care and concern for the least of these, just as it has the last century-and-a-half.

Mark T. Pile, MSHA, MSW
President/CEO



Taken in October, the photograph depicts the rear of the Old Main building on The Lutheran Home at Topton campus. The building now includes an elevator (center), designed to match the appearance of the historic structure.

Old Main project nears completion

LAST FALL—nearly 120 years after the first superintendent of the Topton Orphans Home began construction of the home’s iconic Old Main building by digging out “in the shape of a cross ... several wheelbarrowsful of ground”—participants broke ground for a major renovation project on the building.

Now, that \$8.2 million project nears completion.

Staff from Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, as well as from ministry support offices currently located in the Medical Arts Building near the campus of Luther Crest, Allentown, Pennsylvania, will relocate to Old Main in early January.

“The construction work moves along very well,” says Mark Pile, Diakon president/CEO, “and we are very pleased by how nicely the renovation project, including the required addition of an elevator at the rear of the building, has preserved the character of Old Main,” which is on the National Park Service’s National Register of Historic Places.

A significant bequest from the late Helen Palmer of Wyomissing, Pennsylvania, provided seed money for the project, which in addition to exterior and mechanical systems work, turned the second floor of the 32,000-square-foot building into a “permanency center” for Diakon Adoption & Foster Care as well as created space for a number of Diakon’s support offices.

The Helen N. Palmer Center for Permanency will be dedicated, along with other aspects of the project, during the spring of 2018. The center will include space for training of adoption and foster care staff and support groups for parents, as well as family-style areas helpful in the process of transitioning children and youths into foster and adoptive families.

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Adopted child ‘pays it forward’ with fundraising campaign

IN A RECENT MANYVOICES. ONE HEART. BLOG POST for Diakon (blog.diakon.org), Lori Roth wrote about a favorite song that focuses on caring for the “next one in line.”

She hoped it was a message her adopted son would take to heart. It appears, as she notes in her blog post, she needn’t worry.

Last year, that son, Cayden, was asked to participate in the symbolic groundbreaking for a major renovation project within Old Main at The Lutheran Home at Topton, including creation of a center for permanency for Diakon Adoption & Foster Care.



Cayden Roth

“Cayden was an incredible gift,” says Roth, “and it’s important to us that he knows how important it is to give back. We pointed out the \$100 book sponsorship and the \$500 rocking chair sponsorship” available as part of the permanency center project. “But Cayden had his heart set on the \$5,000 playroom sponsorship,” she adds.

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Diakon prepares to celebrate *Continued from Page 1*

Orphans Home in Berks County, Pennsylvania,” the initial name of The Lutheran Home at Topton—the second children’s home in Diakon’s long history.

Like Willard, Heilman was charged with raising funds for the home; he also played a personal role in getting the building program underway.

According to published histories, during dawn of June 1897—one month after the first orphans arrived to stay in the original Topton farmhouse—the Superintendent, with pick and shovel on his back, went

out to the site of the projected main building and placed himself on the spot where his office was to be.”

Asking God’s blessing, “he dug out, in the shape of a cross, about the size of a man, several wheelbarrowsful of ground. Then looking towards the north and kneeling in the cross-shaped opening, he offered a brief prayer.” Building began in earnest later in the year.

From those two roots arose the ministries on which Diakon is founded. The rest of this storied history will be shared throughout 2018.

Old Main *Continued from Page 3*

“We are very pleased to recognize Helen Palmer by naming the center for her,” says Pile. The portion of her bequest not used as seed money for the Old Main project was placed in the Diakon Lutheran Fund where, along with other funds, it will generate income in perpetuity to support Diakon’s services for children and families.

“We believe that is a very fitting way to honor and remember Mrs. Palmer, whose concern for children is what led her to be a supporter of The Lutheran Home at Topton,” Pile adds.

The first floor of Old Main will continue to house the Brandywine

Community Library, the historic Putz train layout and some Diakon staff offices. Eventual but tentative plans include development of a center to highlight the history of the Topton and Tressler orphanages, the two homes for children from which Diakon’s arose.

As part of the transition, Diakon sold the Medical Arts Building and property to the Lehigh Valley Health Network. “Diakon is really about service to people in need and not about owning office property, so we were pleased with this sale,” says Scott Habecker, Diakon’s chief financial and chief operating officer, who negotiated the transaction.

Adopted child *Continued from Page 3*

The playroom will be a warm and inviting place that can often help ease transitions for children involved in moving to foster care.

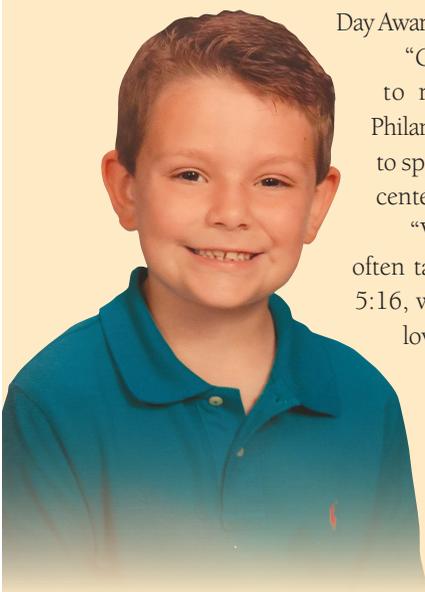
With that in mind, the family began a year-long fundraising campaign that involved a variety of small events and projects and support from family and friends.

Cayden and his family met—and, in fact, surpassed—their goal, raising \$5,170 for the playroom and permanency center project.

The campaign was a success in another way: Cayden was selected to receive the “Outstanding Youth in Philanthropy Award” from the Eastern Pennsylvania Chapter of the Association of Fund Raising Professionals. The award was presented at the National Philanthropy Day Awards breakfast Nov. 1 at DeSales University.

“Cayden was honored and overwhelmed to receive the Outstanding Youth in Philanthropy Award for the fundraising he did to sponsor the playroom in the permanency center,” says Lori Roth.

“While we worked to raise the funds, we often talked about the Bible verse, Matthew 5:16, which is ‘Let your light shine.’ Cayden loved that he could show other kids that they, too, can let their light shine and help others—especially if they are blessed with everything they need. We are looking forward to seeing the completed playroom in the next few months!”



JOYCE RICHE, DIRECTOR OF DIAKON

Adoption & Foster Care in eastern Pennsylvania, is interviewed by Spencer Macnaughton and his film crew for a French documentary on adoption in the United States. The 20-minute documentary is being produced for Sept à huit, reportedly the No. 1 news magazine in France and, according to Macnaughton, “very similar in style [and] reputation to 60 Minutes.” The filming represents the third time the success of the Diakon program has attracted the attention of film crews from Europe.

Nurse assists people affected by Hurricane Irma

NATURAL DISASTERS OFTEN BRING OUT

the best in people and many in the region were prompted to donate money or supplies in the wake of hurricanes this year.

Amanda Estrada, a registered nurse at The Lutheran Home at Topton, went one step further.

When she heard there was a need for nurses following Hurricane Harvey in Texas, she applied and was accepted as a volunteer with the American Red Cross.

“When I heard that nurses were needed, I thought it was something I could help with,” she says. “I’ve never been away from my family for that long, but I want my children to help others, too. I hope that they will volunteer one day when they are older.”

Estrada lives in Greenwich Township, Berks County, Pennsylvania, with her husband and four children ages 17, 8, 7, and 5.

As the nurse was getting ready to head to Texas, she learned she would be going instead to Jacksonville, Florida, one of the worst-hit areas of the state by Hurricane Irma. She soon was on her way to Jacksonville for her first deployment as a nurse-volunteer, assigned to the Southside Baptist Church Shelter, a special-needs shelter.

The day she arrived, the shelter was assisting 77 residents, some with seizure disorders, some with service animals, and others with diabetes. In addition, there were children of all ages. “People came and went every day depending on their situation,” with the shelter serving as many as 91 people in a given day.

Most were local residents displaced by flooding, their homes either destroyed or without power. Some people were brought by bus when another shelter closed, while others were transported by police because not all shelters offered the health services the Southside Baptist Church shelter provided. “We had a second surge of people several days after the storm when homes began to have mold and poor air quality and were no longer habitable,” Estrada explains.

Typically, six people staffed the shelter, Red Cross volunteers from as far as California and Washington State, as well as church members. For the first five days, Estrada was the only nurse.

The staff slept on cots in the library. While they had access to water, the electricity went out occasionally. They and residents shared four showers and ate together in the dining room, making their own breakfast and lunch every day with dinners provided by local churches.

Estrada worked 7 to 7 each day and was on call at night. “I got woken up a lot, but it’s hard to sleep on a cot anyway,” she says. “It was hard to walk through the church without someone stopping and asking for help with something. There was a lot of need.”

She attended to acute needs, assessing residents who had medical issues or who had gone without their medication for several days. She also offered educational assistance but notes that “access to medications was definitely the biggest issue.”

She sent a homeless Veteran who had lost his blood-pressure medicine and begun to experience chest pains to the emergency room, visiting him every day while he was in the hospital. “He came back to the shelter then and the support team there was able to help him find a place to live. He came in homeless but left with multiple avenues of assistance and they also helped him utilize his Veteran’s benefits to ensure he would have permanent housing.”

Estrada’s 10-day mission coincided with closure of the temporary shelter. “Every resident who was displaced had a plan for housing with assistance from FEMA, the Red Cross and the church,” she says. “I did see some of the devastated areas and it will take time before many of the residents will be able to return to their homes.”

She adds: “I wish I could have done more. There is still so much need. I’ve always tried to teach my children not to take things for granted. It was hard to see families with small children stranded in a shelter. I can’t imagine how I would feel if that were me and my children.”

Her experience, she says, was both humbling and rewarding, prompting her to advise others to volunteer when needed.



Residents enjoy meeting fourth-grade pen pals

THERE AREN'T MANY PEOPLE WHO STILL TAKE THE TIME TO

craft hand-written letters.

That's not true, however, for a group of residents of Diakon's Luther Crest in Allentown, Pennsylvania, and the nearby Lutheran Home at Topton and a group of fourth-grade students from Mosser Elementary School in Allentown.

They have been participating in a Pen Pal program that ended up being a win for everyone involved.

Throughout the 2016-2017 school year, residents and students wrote to each other about once a month, conveying information about their families, their school and what was going on in their everyday lives. Interestingly, several residents who participated were former Mosser students or had children who attended the elementary school.

"The residents and students really embraced this experience and they all established relationships with their pen pals," says Jen Laury, director of community life at Luther Crest.

"The students were very motivated to write to their pen pals and also were genuinely interested in the residents' stories. Despite their age and lifestyle differences, they were able to make strong connections and appreciate each other," notes Gleasy Bilger, a 4th-grade teacher at the school.

In early spring, the students visited their pen pals at Luther Crest and Topton, sitting down with cookies and punch to get to know one another. The students also sang and performed skits for the residents.

"The students were excited to visit Luther Crest and Topton and it was an experience to remember for them. It was amazing to see the students interact with the residents with respect and kindness," says Bilger. "Our students are from an urban area and don't often have this type of experience. They were thrilled to hear the connections some of the residents had with Mosser. One resident even brought a photo taken at Mosser during his time as a student there."

Then, in early summer, 20 residents visited the school on "Leadership Day." Students showed science-fair projects, guided the residents on a tour of the school and met individually with their pen pals in their classrooms.

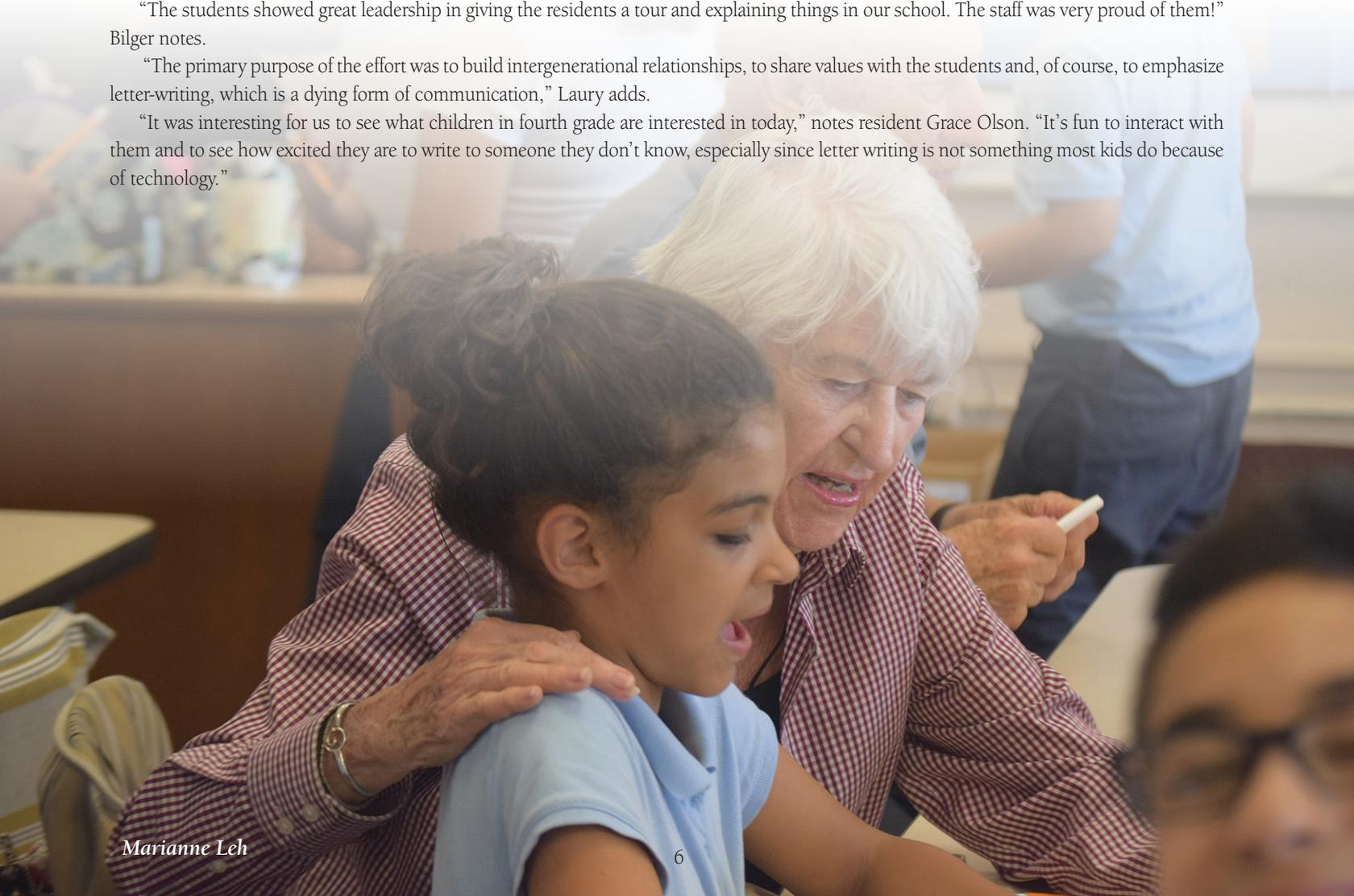
"The students showed great leadership in giving the residents a tour and explaining things in our school. The staff was very proud of them!" Bilger notes.

"The primary purpose of the effort was to build intergenerational relationships, to share values with the students and, of course, to emphasize letter-writing, which is a dying form of communication," Laury adds.

"It was interesting for us to see what children in fourth grade are interested in today," notes resident Grace Olson. "It's fun to interact with them and to see how excited they are to write to someone they don't know, especially since letter writing is not something most kids do because of technology."



Barbara Kehm



Twining resident-author writes of a life fulfilled

AS THE POPULAR INTERNET CATCHPHRASE NOTES: “EVERY MORNING you have two choices: continue to sleep with your dreams, or wake up and chase them.”

Joe Kiernan long ago chose the latter.

The Twining Village resident has enjoyed a fulfilling life, which he has chronicled in books, short stories and poetry.

Born and reared in Philadelphia, Kiernan enlisted in the Air Force after graduating from high school in 1943 and served for two years.

During that time, he flew 35 combat missions as a ball-turret gunner on a B-24 in Europe. In 1946, thanks to the recently enacted Servicemen’s Readjustment Act or “GI Bill of Rights,” he enrolled at St. Joseph’s University and graduated with a degree in sociology.

That piece of his personal history—a dream unrealized for so many before him—would not have been possible without the GI Bill, he says.

Following graduation from St. Joseph’s, he went to Temple University to obtain his master’s degree. He then entered the corporate world, having worked for three decades at both RCA and General Electric. Simultaneously, he became an adjunct professor, teaching sociology for 28 years at St. Joseph’s. He retired from GE in 1988 and formed Princeton Administrative Systems, Inc., providing information systems consulting services until 2012.

It was in 2002 that he added to his life’s achievements the title of author. His first book, *The Only War I Ever Attended*, dealt with his experiences on those 35 World War II bombing missions over Europe as a B-24 ball-turret gunner.

Five years later, he released a memoir, *Life as a Guest: Deo Gratias*. Although he jokingly says he would have preferred the title, *Drinking medicinal Scotch through a straw while rounding third*, his book *Life as a Guest* presents a fascinating blend of life experiences, exceptional insights and strong personal values in a captivating, story-filled memoir.

Kiernan says he finds inspiration for his books by drawing on his background in the military, social work, academia, corporate life and consulting and reflecting on each of those spheres in the light of his faith and family relationships.

He took that success and continued to write, this time about his love for Philadelphia high school basketball. *Wartime Cinderella: Philly Hoop Memories* is a classic 1943 high school basketball “Tournament of Champions” story with a surprise “Cinderella” ending served with a charming tribute to today’s scholastic game and those who coach, play and support it.

Wartime Cinderella: Philly Hoop Memories arose from Philadelphia’s historic 1943 Red Cross Tournament of Champions, which brought together in wartime four scholastic title holders from the public, Catholic, inter-academic and suburban leagues. Three had more than a 95 percent winning record. One, Lower Merion, had won nearly 60 games and taken an unprecedented three consecutive state championships. Yet the underdog Cinderella winner, Roman Catholic High, loser of its first six games, took the crown.

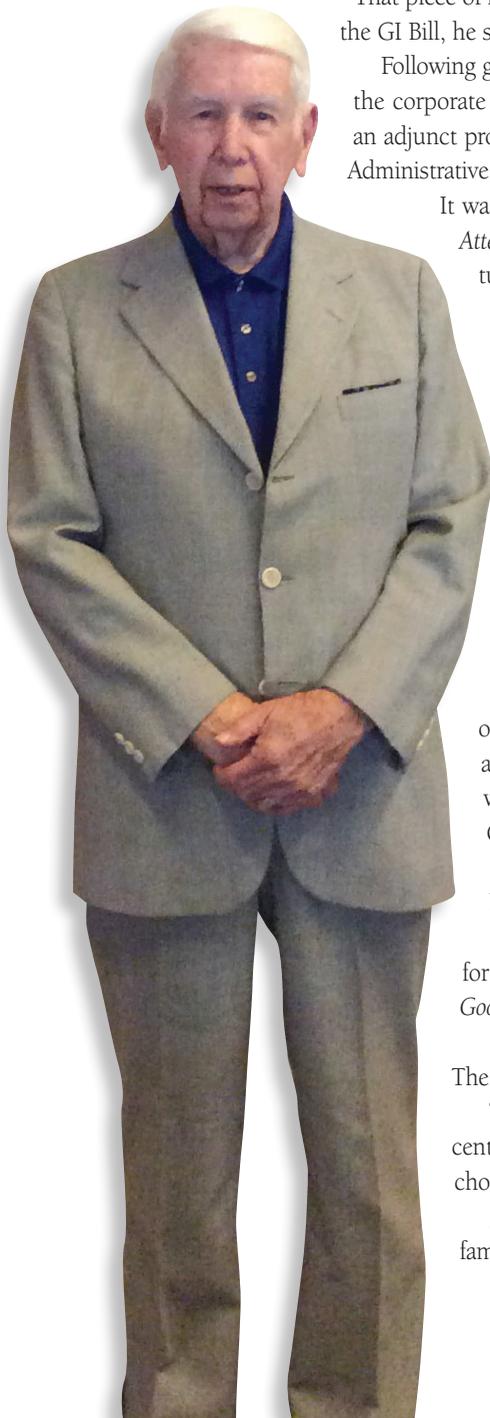
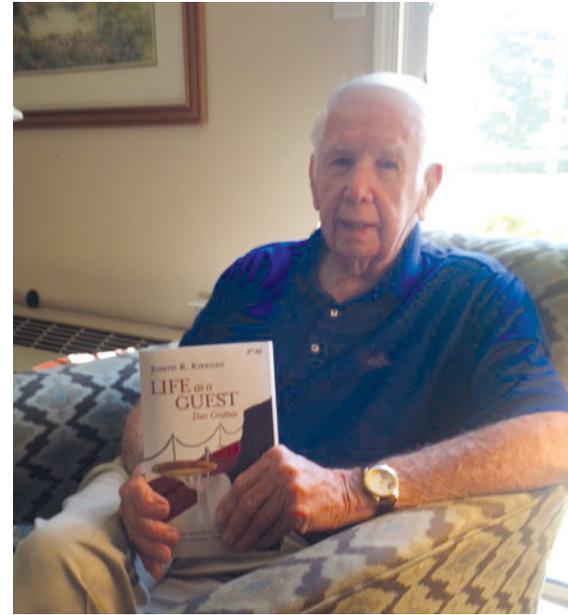
That book sets the stage for another Kiernan wrote, entitled *Billy Markward and Friends* (2016), about Roman Catholic High’s legendary coach, who led the school to 20 titles over 40 years.

Today, Kiernan, who has a family of five children and nine grandchildren, enjoys his time writing poetry for residents and staff of Twining Village. In fact, he is working on a collection of recollections, *In Praise Of Good Words*, for 2018 publication.

He and his late wife, Betty, moved to the community in 2012, after having lived in New Jersey for 38 years. The community, he says, has proved to be a great home.

“We searched for a couple of years,” he says. “We liked what we saw here. We were attracted to the wellness center, with nurses and day-to-day assistance if needed. We formed new friendships. There are activities if you choose to participate, or you may do your own thing. I can honestly say this was a good decision.”

Joe sees his life as a “gift,” noting that “my life is the totality of God’s continued blessings in marriage, family, career and friendships. It is my honest outlook.”





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