

# DIALOG

A publication of Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries

Summer/Fall 2012

## Local bakers brighten birthdays for foster children



By your financial support and donations you can help Diakon Adoption & Foster Care touch the lives of children in need. Your gifts provide financial assistance to help subsidize families' adoption fees or provide necessary personal care items and clothing for foster children and youths.

Birthdays were always a big deal in Kara Hughes' family.

"We would look back over the year and celebrate all that we had accomplished and all God had given us," says the recent college graduate, who grew up in Allentown, Pa., and currently lives in York, Pa.

After graduating from York College, Kara went on a mission trip to Moldova through the World Orphans organization. The fond memories of her own birthdays contrasted sharply with what she saw in that tiny Eastern European country.

"There were so many children without stable family environments," Kara says. "When I got back, I decided I wanted to do something for children without families here at home. I happened to pass a Diakon office and I knew they had adoption services. That's how the idea started."

Her 'idea' was to make special birthday cakes for children and youths being served by Diakon Adoption & Foster Care. In addition to a full-time day job, Kara is a part-time baker at Macklin's Cupcakes & Coffee shop in York. Everything quickly began to fall into place. The shop's owner, Mack Farquhar, was on board immediately. He would donate all the ingredients and Kara would bake on her own time.

"It's our intention to be a greater part of the community," Mack says. "This is just one avenue for us to give back."

The first cake was for a 10-year-old girl in foster care whose favorite colors are purple and pink and who loves butterflies.

"The cake part is actually individual cupcakes and then the icing covers it all," Hughes explains. "The first one was in the shape of a butterfly with plenty of purple and pink."

Kara and Mack are eager to create more cupcake cakes for children served by Diakon and perhaps other children in need in their community. Kara hopes that she can give these kids even just a small taste of the joy she experienced celebrating her own birthdays.

"I prefer to bake when it's for a special purpose such as this," she says. "That's when it's really fun." ■

Mack Farquhar, owner of Macklin's Cupcakes & Coffee in York, Pa., left, and employee Kara Hughes, donate time and materials to prepare special birthday treats and precious memories for the children of Diakon Adoption & Foster Care.



# OUR MISSION

Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries: *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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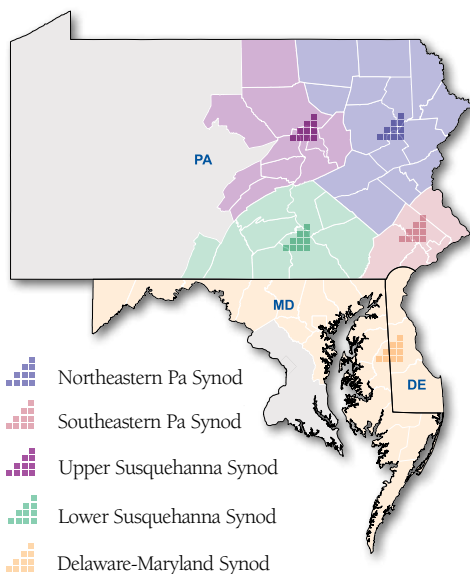
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# THE PRESIDENT'S DIALOG

Diakon and Lutheran Social Services of South Central Pennsylvania—a sister Lutheran social ministry organization based in York, Pa.—recently announced the integration of our home care programs, effective July 1.

For some people, particularly those who have long known of our Diakon Hospice Saint John program, this news came as a surprise and as one more “change” in what seems like a litany of transitions.

Among changes were the closure earlier this year of Diakon Adult Day Services at Mountain Glade in Oakland, Md., the recent transition of Diakon KidzStuff and Diakon Inroads EAP to other providers, and the quite-recent integration of the Diakon Hospice Saint John, Diakon Home Health, and Diakon Help at Home programs into Lutheran Home Care & Hospice, Inc., a subsidiary LSS organization on whose board Diakon will have representation.

Such significant changes may have you asking: What is going on here?

What is occurring is a careful and deliberate refinement of our core ministries in response to today’s economic challenge, including limited benevolent-care dollars, but also very much in concert with our goal of **expanding** key ministries.

While we did close the Mountain Glade program after years of trying to increase census in a very rural location, Diakon KidzStuff and Diakon Inroads EAP—both one-of-a-kind programs within our lines of service—continue to serve people in need. They’re now simply part of organizations that specialize in that type of program.

Although Diakon Hospice Saint John has a long and proud history of service to the terminally ill and their families, Diakon Home Health initially began as palliative care and was never configured to provide the type of home care needed in today’s health-care environment. Changes in health care demand a continuum of services. While an audit confirmed we did not have the internal resources to create such an extensive home care program, Lutheran Home Care & Hospice, Inc., has long-term experience in home care. The idea of integration was thus born—allowing Diakon to provide home care in many of our senior living communities and the regions surrounding them and helping LSS – South Central to expand home care services.

And so Diakon Hospice Saint John, Diakon Home Health, and Diakon Help at Home will continue—under a new name, yes, but with the same outstanding care traditionally provided by Diakon and LSS staff members.

In the midst of such changes, we may overlook exciting developments at our senior living communities—a new health care center being built at Buffalo Valley Lutheran Village, Lewisburg, Pa.; major renovations taking place at Twining Village in Bucks County, Pa.; refurbishment soon to begin to the personal and health care centers at Luther Crest in Allentown, Pa.; and the continuation of marketing for new apartments in Union Square at Frey Village, Middletown, Pa.

And that list does not take into consideration growth planned for our child and family services.

Diakon Adoption & Foster Care’s Family Finding program, for example, has experienced amazing growth recently, while Diakon Youth Services has expanded Turning Point in Lancaster County, opened an exciting new greenhouse program at the Diakon Wilderness Center, and is exploring several other expansion options.

...Continued on page 6.



Mark T. Pile, MSHA, MSW, Diakon President/CEO

## Students put lives on track with adventure-based learning

Adventure-based educational initiatives are all about trust.

“The focus on safety forces [participants] to think about someone else,” says Amy Rossow, lead teacher for Carlisle High School’s alternative education program. And, for the at-risk students in her program, trust is not something they come by easily. But after participating in multiple adventure-based initiatives led by the Diakon Wilderness Center throughout the school year, the students have a new appreciation for their classmates.

“The kids are all so different when they first come in; it ends up like a little family,” says Greg Sallie, who co-teaches with Rossow. “They share a lot of things they wouldn’t realize on the surface.”

Staff members from the wilderness center, located near Boiling Springs, Pa., have been leading the school’s alternative education students in such activities as ropes courses, hiking, rock climbing, and canoeing for five years. Combined with class-work and community service, the adventures go a long way toward building positive traits.



“My co-worker had always had a vision of getting students motivated through experiential learning—right out there in the nitty-gritty of the world,” Rossow explains. “They work on how to solve problems, communicate, learn emotional self-control, overcome fears, and be put in positions where their leadership can shine and take over.”

All the hard work pays off, the teacher says. For the last three years, she has been compiling data to measure the effect participation in the wilderness-based challenges has had on student performance.

“We’ve seen more students over the last three years buy into the program,” she says, adding that students have to earn the right to participate in the field trips. “Another trend we’ve noticed is that attendance has improved. And we have some students who are passing classes who haven’t passed classes in a number of years.”

The program works in part because of the relationship the school has with staff of the Diakon Wilderness Center, specifically Mike Savario, who has been involved with the Carlisle program nearly three years.

“He has been very consistent with us. He gets along with our students. He knows our expectations,” says Rossow. “He knows that our ultimate goal is to get the students to work within themselves and overcome challenges they have in life.” ■

*Students from Carlisle High School’s alternative education program participate in adventure-based initiatives at Diakon Wilderness Center.*

## Mother ‘blown away’ by change in her son

“Wow! I am blown away.”

With those simple words written in a testimonial to Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries, Victoria Murphy made it very clear what she thought of the Youthful Offender pilot program and the impact it had on her son.

“I can’t say enough about the program and how it transformed my son and his way of thinking,” she says. “The staff was awesome. The things they taught my son are beyond anything I could have hoped for.”

Since returning home, Murphy’s son has had an entirely different attitude, is confident, and is proud to share all that he learned during the 30-day wilderness challenge program that targets first-time, non-violent offenders ages 18 to 24 facing a felony conviction. If the young men successfully complete the program, their felony is reduced to a misdemeanor giving them a chance at turning their lives around.

“I can’t thank the staff enough for giving my son a second chance at a healthy life and with a set of emotional tools that he can use for the rest of his life,” says Murphy, adding that she is a very proud parent. “Thank you, thank you, thank you, Diakon.” ■

## Young men get second chance in Youthful Offenders program

“I was really nervous about doing this whole thing,” says Justin Witman. “But once I started, I was having so much fun. I was so impressed with myself and felt so accomplished. It was an amazing experience.”

That is how Witman describes his first rock-climbing experience during the pilot program of the newest 30-day wilderness challenge program offered by the Diakon Wilderness Center, Boiling Springs, Pa. Developed in conjunction with the Bucks County probation office, the program targets first-time, non-violent offenders ages 18


to 24 facing a felony conviction. That conviction is reduced to a misdemeanor if the young men successfully complete the program, which gives them a chance to turn their lives around.

Participants in the Youthful Offenders program spend 30 days living outdoors, where they complete challenging physical and emotional activities under the guidance of specially trained staff. Throughout the experience they share responsibilities, learn problem-solving and communication skills, ...

*Continued on page 6.*



*Participants of the Diakon Wilderness Center’s first Youthful Offender program head out for a 30-day wilderness challenge.*

 The Diakon Wilderness Center depends on your generous giving to continue making a remarkable difference in the lives of at-risk young people. Please use the enclosed envelope to help.

# Diakon senior living communities expand, enhance facilities to meet older adults' needs



## Buffalo Valley Lutheran Village

■ The foundation for a new nursing care center is currently being built at Buffalo Valley Lutheran Village in Lewisburg, Pa. Construction began following a May 1 groundbreaking ceremony. The completed, \$14 million nursing care center will offer 102 beds, a mix of private and semi-private accommodations, and a state-of-the-art, 1,900-square-foot physical therapy suite for both short- and longer-term rehabilitation.

Funds are currently being raised for this major project. Led by Gary Baylor and Ron Dreese, a volunteer committee has already successfully raised more than \$110,000 toward a \$1 million goal. For information on how you can help, please contact John Allison at (717) 795-0470. ■

## Luther Crest

■ To begin this year, a project at Luther Crest, a Diakon Lutheran Senior Living Community in Allentown, Pa., will refurbish the community's personal and health care centers, coordinating their design with recent extensive renovations and expansion of senior living residences on the campus; the project also will create a 13-bed memory-support unit, a service currently not offered by Luther Crest.

Led by Luther Crest resident Paul Fenstermacher, a committee of 10 volunteers has been soliciting funds for these improvements and has raised more than \$375,000 to date. Please help them to meet their \$1 million goal with a generous contribution. For more information, readers may contact Tim Bilger at (610) 682-1443. ■



## Twining Village

■ A variety of improvements are currently under way at Twining Village in Holland, Pa. Scheduled for completion by or before the end of the year are site walkways, dining renovations, the addition of a lobby, and various site improvements. Additional projects, including construction of a therapy suite, are planned for the near future.

A committee of volunteers is being assembled to help raise funds for these improvements. To learn how you can help with this worthy cause, or to make a donation, please contact Joie Barry at (610) 682-1354. ■



## *Leave your signature on a Diakon senior living community!*

Naming opportunities exist at each of the Diakon senior living communities at which extensive renovations are under way for individuals and organizations willing to give generously of their resources.

Did you know that Diakon's "Benevolent Care Promise" to residents assures them that even if they outlive their resources, they will have a home in a Diakon community? And the only

way we have been able to honor that promise is through our long history of generous donors who help us provide this security to older persons. Please be part of this giving legacy!

To learn how you can honor or remember someone at one of our communities, please contact one of the giving officers listed above. And thank you from all of our residents.

## Former dancer shares her gift



**Top:** In 1960, Dunkling was a June Taylor Dancer, and later in her career, a Rockette.

**Bottom:** Jan Dunkling leads the Exercettes in a dance-based exercise routine as part of the PrimeTime Health program.

■ Seven years ago, Jan Dunkling sat in church listening to the pastor's sermon about sharing the gifts that God has given us. Dunkling considered the pastor's message and decided that she wanted to share her gift—one that she had given up years ago—with others.

As a former member of the June Taylor dancers, a dance group featured on Jackie Gleason's various television variety programs, Dunkling began dancing as a young child.

"I had a lot of nervous energy as a baby," she says. Her pediatrician recommended dance school as an outlet for her energy and her mother enrolled her when she was 2 ½ years old. When she was 14, she auditioned for the June Taylor dancers and was chosen for one of 16 slots from a pool of 700 girls. For five years, Dunkling kept a rigorous schedule of practicing and filming for the show.

"It was a tremendously hard job. We rehearsed eight hours a day, five days a week," says Dunkling.

When she was 19, she hurt her foot and knew she could not go back to dancing on the concrete floor on which the Taylor dancers practiced. She went home that evening, called the Rockettes and performed with that group for 2½ years before deciding to give up dancing.

"At that point, I decided I didn't want to have anything to do with dancing," she says.

She married, had children, and spent the next 40 years raising her family, working in banking, and doing choreography for local theater productions and beauty pageants.

Then in 2004, Dunkling attended a dance-based exercise class in Schuylkill Haven, Pa. Teddi Cunningham, coordinator of PrimeTime Health, a Diakon Community Services for Seniors program in Schuylkill County, noticed that Dunkling quickly picked up the routine. She asked if the former dancer would be interested in leading the class. Dunkling declined, explaining that she had given up her career years ago.

Several years later, however, Dunkling sat in church listening to the pastor's homily. She knew that God wanted her to show others how to dance.

"God had given me a gift and told me to share it," she says. And so for the past eight years, Dunkling has been sharing her talent with the members of the PrimeTime Health exercise class, the Exercettes, witnessing the class grow from six to 60 participants.

Dunkling says no one in her family was in show business or musically inclined, but she is grateful for her gift.

"I thank God everyday for the talent I have," says Dunkling. "After all, someone had to give it to me!" ■



## Girls' kind gesture rewarded in special way

■ A kindness quilt, stitched by students and staff of Loyalsock Valley Elementary School, Montoursville, Pa., recently blanketed the foyer of Central Elementary, South Williamsport, as a token of appreciation for the support the Central elementary school's Girls on the Run program offered following a devastating flood last September.

The quilt was presented by Loyalsock Valley Guidance Counselor Alice Weiler.

"Thirteen of our families lost everything, but everyone was affected by the enormity of this tragedy," says Weiler. "There is no way to describe the feeling you have when you see entire lives or portions of them washed away. Pat (Peltier-) Russell was one of the first calls I received asking what could be

done. The support that Girls on the Run and Central offered was amazing." Peltier-Russell is Diakon Family Life Services' school-based outreach counselor and Central Elementary School GOTR coach. The GOTR program is sponsored by Diakon Family Life Services.

In the aftermath of the flood, the Central Elementary School GOTR spearheaded support in the form of written expressions. The group, as well as Central Elementary School students and staff, made cards with words of care and concern. They also made a billboard-sized banner of support displaying the motto, "We've got your back." The banner was shown to every student and then hung on the school's wall.

In addition, the girls wrote inspirational

words of encouragement on the banner. Adorned with blue, gold, and white ribbons, the banner was not only a physical reminder to be resilient, but also a symbolic one.

"Central school's colors are blue and white and Loyalsock's are blue and gold. The poster shared the blue ribbon," says Weiler. "The banner and cards were especially comforting to a group of students and a staff member called the Hoppy Hopefuls, who were among those hardest hit by the flood."

Following Weiler's presentation of the quilt, the words "we've got your back," could be heard echoing through the foyer as a group of girls from the Girls on the Run program circled the quilt to read the notes.

... *Continued on page 6.*

## Girls' kind gesture (cont.)

*Continued from page 5...* “We gave something to them, and we didn’t expect anything back,” says one girl. “This means so much. It makes me feel good that we really did help them so much that they wanted to say thanks,” added another.

Peltier-Russell says the Girls on the Run program has a community service component.

“Projects like this one teach the girls what it means to reach out. They understood the

losses endured by the students at Loyalsock and they wanted to help them cope with their grief.”

In addition to the cards and banner, the girls created a slide show that projected heart-tugging pictures of the flood to their local student body. The girls talked about loss and how to support one another during difficult times. In essence, they taught others how to “run” to those in need.

“This project just grew and grew,” says Peltier-Russell. “It was really cool to see them work so hard to reach out to others. They can now say ‘look what we did and look at the impact.’”

The GOTR program builds self-respect, develops physical health, and fosters community service for girls in third through eighth grades. ■■

*Participants in the Central Elementary School Girls on the Run Program look at a quilt that was presented to them by students at Loyalsock Valley Elementary School. The quilt was sent in appreciation of the girls' kindness after a flood devastated the Montoursville area.*



## The President's Dialog (cont.)

*Continued from page 2...* Certainly, most of us would prefer lives with limited change. However, if you review the histories of the many organizations whose ministries Diakon continues, you'll find those histories replete with change. The key point to remember: Then, as now, that change was focused on the future—and on serving people with the finest and most compassionate and gracious care.

*Mark T. Rile*

## Young men get second chance (cont.)

*Continued from page 3...* and overcome fears as they create a foundation for their successful return to home and community.

Broken into four components, the curriculum helps participants understand how to contribute to a healthy environment in their community, build skills to be self-reliant, take responsibility for the choices they made, and map out their future.

Although this was the first time the wilderness center targeted young men in this age group, the pilot was very successful, with all nine participants completing the program, says Anthony Brau, program manager.

“They were invested, willing, and responded well to us,” he says. “We’ve only known them 30 days, but I feel like we’ve seen growth in all of them.”

Brau brought together two seasoned wilderness instructors—Aaron Teague and Dave Bellante—to lead the program on the trail.

Teague says the young participants faced tremendous physical, mental, and emotional challenges, including a 72-hour solo camping experience and an 18-mile hike that started at 7 p.m. and ended at 6:30 a.m. the following day.

“It was the hardest I ever pushed a group, pushed myself,” Teague says. “I hit stages of incredible difficulty. I can only imagine what these guys were experiencing.”

Witman, who felt especially challenged by the program’s physical requirements, says the experience was very difficult, but at the same time had a great impact on him personally.

“The physical-ness [of the program] brought out a lot of personal problems,” he says.

“Everything I struggled with brought out more and more that I’d been holding back. I got to talk about them and break them down.”

By looking to one another for support as they completed the program’s challenges, the young men built healthy relationships, learned the value of teamwork, and made friends they can count on when their resolve to turn their lives around is tested.

“We had ups and downs, but we fought through it,” says Witman. “It’s going to be really hard and a struggle, but I have to fight through it. I’m glad I’ve got these eight individuals to help me.” ■■

# Uncertain past leads to promising future for adopted girl

“When I was a child, my future was uncertain to say the least, until Diakon came into the picture,” says Crystal Gilbert, 18. Despite the challenges she faced at an early age, she knew then that her future would be brighter.

As young children, Crystal Gilbert and her siblings, Kevin and Jenna, were neglected and didn’t even have enough food to eat. Crystal was only 3 years old when she and her brother and sister were removed from their home and placed in foster care, the girls in one foster home, their brother in another. Even though life improved with her foster family, Crystal hoped for the day that she would live with both of her siblings again.

Around this time, Wesley and Nancy Gilbert decided they wanted to adopt a child. They began adoption-preparation classes and, according to Crystal, realized how much of a difference they could make in a child’s life. A year later, they received a call from Diakon

Adoption & Foster Care: The Gilberts were asked to consider taking not only one child, but three—Crystal, Kevin, and Jenna.

Kathy Roach, director of the northeastern Pennsylvania office of Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, says, “When we are placing children in a foster or adoptive home, we always try to place siblings together. Siblings should have the opportunity to grow up together in the same family.”

The choice was not an easy one for the Gilberts. But after several visitations with the children, they knew they wanted to give the siblings a permanent

home—together. “When we met these kids, we felt like we had known them forever,” says Mrs. Gilbert. The Gilberts formally adopted Crystal and her siblings in 2002.

The adoption brought a sense of belonging and stability to Crystal, who says she felt she had been a “visitor” in her foster home. “Being adopted meant I wouldn’t have to worry where my next meal was coming from or whether I was ever going to be reunited with my siblings.”

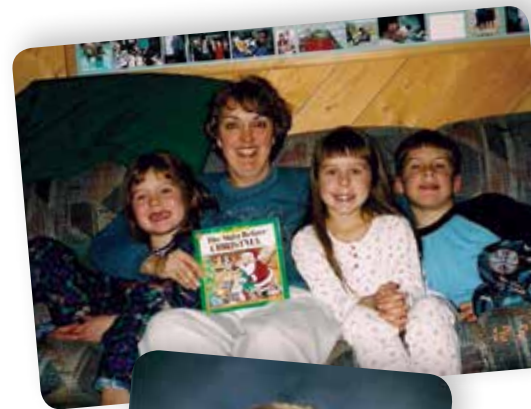
Crystal credits the “influence of the many good teachers” she has had for providing her with a sense of direction and the support she has needed in deciding to attend college. “They taught me I can do anything that I put my mind to and not to let my learning disabilities hold me back,” she says.

With the help of a \$5,000 Diakon Youth Scholarship, Crystal will pursue a degree in education next year as a college freshman.

“They taught me I can do anything I put my mind to...”

“Diakon provided me with an opportunity to be a great person with a loving family and to have a sense of stability in my life,” she says. “Diakon gave me a home where I was always told that I could do whatever I put my mind to, and with parents who would always be there for me whenever I needed them.” ■

For more information on adoption and foster care, please go to [www.diakon.org/adoption](http://www.diakon.org/adoption).



**Top:** Nancy Gilbert, center, reads a holiday story to her newly adopted children, from left, Jenna, Crystal, and Kevin, in 2002.

**Bottom:** Crystal Gilbert

By your financial support and donations you can help Diakon Adoption & Foster Care touch the lives of children in need. Your gifts provide financial assistance to help subsidize families’ adoption fees or provide necessary personal care items and clothing for foster children and youths.

Join us Oct. 18 at the fourth annual Dining with Diakon –Eastern PA in support of Diakon Adoption & Foster Care. See page DB-3 for more information.



## Your generosity is appreciated

In 2012, 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 Development at 1-877- DIAKON-7, option 2, extension 21219, or visit [www.diakon.org](http://www.diakon.org). Thank you.



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## ‘Healthcare Heroes’ finalist has heart for volunteerism

■ For the past 15 years, Middletown, Pa. resident Audra Henderson has been volunteering her time at Frey Village, a Diakon Lutheran Senior Living Community in the same town. For her dedication and for demonstrating excellence in the field of health care, she was nominated by Diakon staff as Volunteer of the Year in Central Penn Parent Magazine’s “Healthcare Heroes Award.”

Henderson, who had been a stay-at-home mom, began volunteering with a local hospice program in 1998 and, through that, made a connection to Frey Village.

“Many of the folks in hospice were residents of Frey and that’s what started my interest in volunteering,” she explains. “I also had a sister and some friends who were living there. Since it is walking distance from my home, I decided to go over and see how I could help, and the rest is history.”

Henderson has served on Frey’s auxiliary board the past five years. Her volunteer work includes work with the hospice program, the auxiliary committee, and the spiritual life committee. As part of the Frey Village Abiding Ministry program, she offers companionship, support, and reassurance to those in their last days of life.

“I have enjoyed all aspects of my volunteer life at Frey Village,” she says. “I get so much out of helping residents and participating on the committees that plan fund-raising activities and organize memorial services for those residents who have passed away.”

Henderson says that her most influential role model throughout her life was her mother.

“My mom always taught me that community service and helping those in need was the right thing to do. I am still learning this each day.”

As a finalist in “Healthcare Heroes,” Henderson attended a lunch that honored all finalists and winners and received a plaque.

“I do know one thing—I get more out of visiting residents than I think they do,” she says. I always come home thankful that I can put a bit of sunshine in someone’s day.” ■



*Audra Henderson is a “Healthcare Hero.”*