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# At Liberty

**Connecting  
Through Stories**



FALL/WINTER 2023



# LEADING LIBERTY

WITH **KIMBERLY MCGINNIS**, *Director of Resident Services at The Village at Penn State*



**Q: How does Liberty Lutheran compare to other organizations, and what impact does that make for the people we serve?**

**A:** Liberty Lutheran is the best organization I have ever worked for. I still feel valued and supported after 9 ½ years. I love my job, my coworkers, and those we serve. Because of this, I am empowered to serve our residents and able to effectively and confidently engage with the community at large. I feel Liberty encourages lifelong learning so that we are better able to continue the journey beside our residents.

Liberty has supported me in allowing me to attend the wonderful Fellows in Leadership program, sponsored by Leading Age. This program

connected people and companies across Pennsylvania in similar communities. I learned so much priceless and valuable information. This year, Liberty supported me in becoming a Certified Dementia Practitioner.

Liberty's support allows us to help the people that we serve, whether they're employees or our residents. All the support that we get to better ourselves helps us better serve our residents.

**Q: How do you see the work that you do inspire others in the community?**

**A:** I feel that my entire career's work has prepared me for this opportunity to walk beside residents in their journey called life. As a social worker,

I have encountered different people from all walks of life and experiences. I feel that I can relate to most people. I bring a passion for working with people, whether it be staff or residents and their families, as I walk beside them, listen, help, encourage, or ignite in them a desire to continue pursuing what makes them happy or to find something new to experience.

We work in a customer service oriented environment. We serve our residents in a kind, caring, and compassionate manner every day. The residents are why we are here. The key to our success is their happiness.

**Q: Tell us about an experience you had with Liberty that impacted members and families.**

**A:** We organize special events for residents.

Every year, we hold a Celebration of Life ceremony in memory of those who died over the past year. The residents find it meaningful. This tradition began in 2021 because we couldn't gather during 2020. So many people hadn't been able to pay their respects, or to grieve together openly, so we created an annual Celebration of Life.

We make a big deal out of 100th birthdays at The Village. We throw a community party. It's a lot of fun. The residents appreciate these meaningful events.

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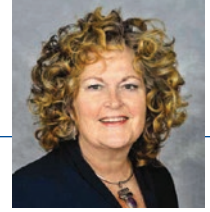
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Greetings from the President



# Connecting Through Stories

CEOs frequently bring messages surrounding future strategies and actions. While our strategic actions are paramount to Liberty's strength today, part of our success comes from our foundational principles built on relationships.

Throughout Liberty Lutheran, we witness the energy that those bonds bring to people's lives. In this issue of *At Liberty*, we highlight an important aspect to building relationships and connecting with others - storytelling.

In telling our stories, we share a part of who we are. We build trust and come to appreciate and honor each other's lives and the contributions we've made and continue to make.

Liberty is grateful for those who share their stories with us. The pages that follow contain illustrations of the many stories we hear within our family of services.

Ms. Suedell began writing at an early age. Her work is inspired by her roots and the people and things around her. Today she enjoys creating poetry and stories for her fellow members at the West Philadelphia Senior Community Center. Her writing is a gift that brings warmth and fosters inclusion.

An esteemed mathematician, Mrs. Robbins was a pioneer in an industry dominated by men. Her accomplishments are impressive, but there is so much more to her story, including her love of travel, music, and connecting to her Native American heritage. When her husband died, her community at The Manor at York Town helped her through that difficult time.

Josephine, a retired teacher and original member of a Divine Nine black sorority, spent her life advancing the rights of women and African-Americans. When she needed extra care and support, her daughter Nicole sought the advice of a trusted friend whose mother lives at Artman. Nicole helped Josephine move to Artman where her mother now enjoys many activities with her new friends and neighbors.

Thank you for helping us honor stories and the bonds of friendships that they forge. Through relationships, the Liberty family strengthens our resiliency and compassion.

*Luanne B. Fisher*

Luanne B. Fisher, PhD  
President and CEO, Liberty Lutheran



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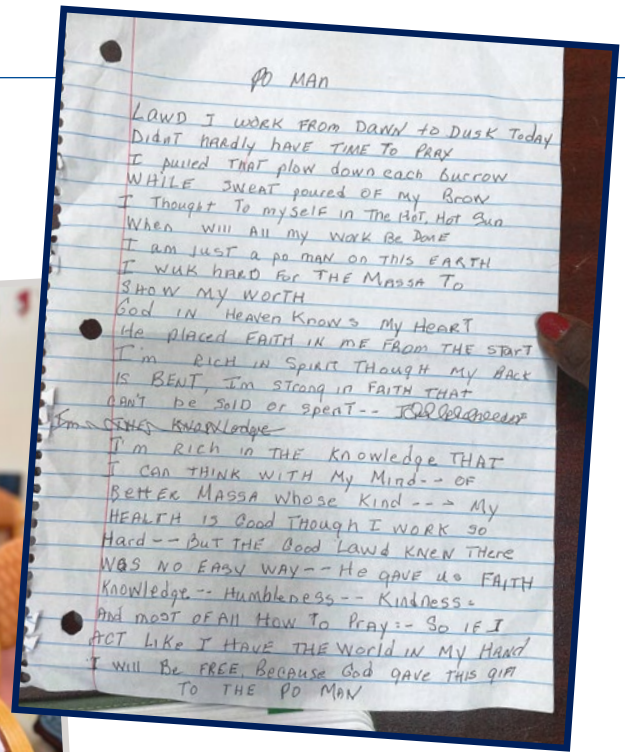
**ABOUT THIS EDITION'S COVER**

*Football season at Penn State brings back fond memories for graduates, and creates new memories for residents at The Village.*



Ms. Suedell:

# A Born Storyteller



**M**s. Suedell, who grew up with a stutter, found her voice through writing. At Sunday school, her teacher, Ms. Helen, taught her that reading develops the mind. She took the message to heart.

“I was a storyteller for the library,” Ms. Suedell shares. “I volunteered. I read stories to the children.” Hearing stories inspired the children’s affection for storytelling. “They wanted more and more stories. Every place I go, I always find something that I can do for the children and for grown people too.”

Among the things that she does is create her own stories and poetry. “I love to write things about people and the things that people do” Ms. Suedell shares.

She enjoys creating for the members of West Philadelphia Senior Community Center, where she’s been a member for years. The people and the programs inspire her. She composed a poem about her fellow members’ habits and routines.

Ms. Suedell displayed her skill for spontaneous poetry after a recent class ceremony in which ten members received certificates for completing the Generations on Line class. The class helps older adults feel comfortable using technology in their daily lives.

Inspired by what she heard, Ms. Suedell composed a short reflective poem, writing:

Technology has taken over,  
 Everything in every way.  
 You can even have God to pray.  
 I have all the things I do.  
 I am creative, and if you know me,  
 That's true.

Ms. Suedell likes to evoke the reader’s feelings, believing that people *feel* stories and poetry the most when they hear it. Earlier this year, a small group of students from School of The Future heard Ms. Suedell recite her poem ‘Po Man’ for a project promoting collaboration between generations. Black history and her South Carolinian childhood inspired the poem, which portrays an enslaved man who reflects on poverty, freedom, and the riches God bestows on people.

“I put my all into reciting the poem,” Ms. Suedell states. Her creative fire remains lively.

“Life is so short! Sometimes, I have so many things I want to say,” she reflects. “I love things that are creative, things that make you think, and that help you. I’m 83. When you’re creative, it helps your mind, because it never stops. Some people think that when you get old, the creativity stops. It gets bigger because you’ve seen so many things go down in front of you already. Here you’re getting older and older. You’re still going to think and remember things.

“That’s a blessing.”



THE MANOR  
*at York Town*



## Mathematician, Philanthropist, and World Class Traveler

**P**rior to her retirement, Elisabeth Robbins was a highly regarded Mathematician who spent her career designing such innovations as nose cones for intercontinental ballistic missiles and spaceships, color televisions, and geometric databases. At the time, Mrs. Robbins was a pioneer in an industry that was dominated by men.

Mrs. Robbins' interests and connections stretch beyond mathematics and include a love of music. As a teenager, she played piano in the Les Brown Orchestra.

Additionally, Mrs. Robbins has a deep connection to her Native American roots. "My great-grandmother was Mohawk and therefore I am very involved in supporting and preserving the Native American culture."

For the past 10 years, Mrs. Robbins has coordinated a Holiday collection drive at The Manor for Native American children. "I am so impressed and pleased that my fellow residents share my passion for Native communities across the United States, and the donation collection continues to grow each year. It gives me great joy to send several large boxes of much needed goods to children within the tribes supported by the Americans for Native Americans (ANA) organization."

In addition to her involvement with the ANA, Mrs. Robbins also spends her time traveling the globe. One of her most prized possessions is a large scale map of the world, hanging prominently in her apartment. The map is adorned with an abundance of push pins, indicating all of the places she has visited.

"Having traveled to 130 countries, I enjoy gazing at my world map to reminisce about all the places I have been," she smiles. The map is still a work in progress, and Mrs. Robbins looks forward to new adventures and future pins placed in remote corners of the world.

Mrs. Robbins made her way to The Manor in 2003, following her corporate retirement. She and her husband decided to downsize from their dream home in central Montgomery County.

Unfortunately, two years after moving to The Manor, Mrs. Robbins' husband, Charles, passed away. "I was very glad we made the move because the staff and my fellow neighbors truly helped me through that difficult time," says Mrs. Robbins. "Twenty years later, I am still proud to call The Manor my home."



The Hearth  
..... at Drexel .....

# Joy Through Music

**C**hloe, a retired teacher, moved to The Hearth at Drexel five years ago, after she had been diagnosed with a serious heart condition. Too sick for surgery then, Chloe needed to move to a caring environment where her medical, physical, social, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual needs could be fulfilled, yet where she could be close to her daughter and her doctors.

With the care of The Hearth's compassionate team, and supportive community relationships, Chloe's health has improved, and she is happy to enjoy all that life at The Hearth has to offer.

"After looking at many senior residential properties, I found The Hearth was the perfect community for Mom," says Shelley. "The Household model offers community-oriented social opportunities combined with personalized care, alongside the privacy that Mom needs."

She adds, "Even better is the fact that the ecumenical spiritual community is one where Mom can regularly worship among her Christian and Jewish friends. She lives minutes away from my home on the Main Line," notes Shelley, "so that I can visit her frequently and she is still within close proximity to her doctors."

"My mother loves playing the ukulele and the piano, so we were thrilled that she could bring both instruments

*Chloe plays her piano and ukulele at The Hearth with her daughter Shelley.*



with her to The Hearth," explains Shelley. "There are many residents who have become supportive friends, with whom Mom can enjoy music, and cultural programs. They dine and share daily activities together. Mom also participates in the art programs because she has always liked painting and other creative pursuits that remind her of activities she shared with her students," Shelley adds.

"My sister, Brenda, and her partner, Guillermo, visit Mom twice a year, and they perform dance demonstrations for the Hearth residents, as they did in May," says Shelley.

"Living at the Hearth, eating excellent meals with friends in her household, being well cared for by the professional team, and engaging as part of the community has brought my mother back to life," according to Shelley. "She has become stronger, healthier and happier. She feels so at home that she doesn't like being away for more than a night or two," concludes Shelley.



# REGAINING HEALTH & VITALITY

**Last fall, retired Philadelphia Police Officer, Gerry,** experienced a medical emergency when his mouth started bleeding while he was working as a Security Guard. That day, at Jefferson's Emergency Room downtown, he **was diagnosed with cancer of the mouth,** which required immediate surgery.



"While recovering, I could not eat or talk, since I had a feeding tube. I alternated staying with my two daughters, both of whom are successful career women," he says. "But, I required more medical attention than my daughters could provide due to their work related travel schedules," he explains. They all decided that

Gerry's health might improve if he moved to a community where he could get the kind of personal care attention he needed. **In April, 2023, he moved into Personal Care at Paul's Run,** where he received four nursing visits a day, regular check-ins by other supportive team members



and all his meals prepared for him. "I was weak and tired but I started working with the physical therapist who helped me gain strength and mobility, and the speech therapist taught me how to use my tongue to form words," he adds.

Initially, he kept to himself, eating breakfast in his room. "Once my speech improved, I started spending time at lunch and dinner with my neighbors. That was nice because at home, I was alone, since my daughters were working, traveling, or busy with their lives."

After three months in Personal Care,

**Gerry's strength improved** so much that, in August, he moved to Independent Living at Paul's Run. "That means I have to handle my own medications, as well as shop for myself, to make breakfast and lunch. But I feel ready to do that now," he claims.

While Gerry sits in the lobby at Paul's Run telling his story, residents and team members walk by and wave, saying, "Hey Gerry, how are you doing today?" He waves back, greeting each by name. **"It's nice to be part of the community," he says.**



# The Village

AT PENN STATE



## Connecting with Community by Sharing Stories



Jane moved to The Village at Penn State several years ago, from New Jersey, where she had built a forty year career in Education; starting as a Montessori teacher, growing into a curriculum specialist and principal, to launching her own educational consulting company. She was looking forward to spending her retirement years with her beloved, extroverted husband, Al, whom she had met in high school. Sadly, he became ill and passed away six months after they moved in at The Village in April 2020.

“We moved here to be closer to our daughter, her husband, and our two granddaughters. Our daughter is a Chemical Engineer at Penn State University, and I am grateful that I have them nearby. But there is a terrible void without Al here.” She quickly adds, “However, feeling safe at The Village, surrounded by kind people, gives you time and space to reflect deeply about what matters, and to achieve self-actualization.”

Jane started journaling and writing poetry as a way to come to terms with the grieving process. “It is cathartic, and it has made me become a deeper thinker,” she says. Jane discovered that she is able to express and process her feelings on paper, which in turn has helped her to be more available to share experiences of loss and grief with others. “Being able to hold both grief and happiness makes you a better listener, more appreciative, thoughtful, and grateful,” she asserts.

“When grieving, no one wants advice, because dealing with loss is such a personal process, but it is important just to let the suffering person know you are there for them if they want to talk, or if they need a hug,” she adds.

Jane has started writing a book, entitled, *How to Be Brave*, which she explains is also about how to have hope. “It deals with how one person being brave and going into the world can help another person to open the door, to have the courage to take the first step to venture into the world,” she elaborates.

“It is about the process through which a grieving person passes in order to regain a sense of purpose and meaning in life,” Jane concludes.





## Finding Community & Friendship

**N**icole planned that her mother, Josephine, a well-educated, cultured, retired teacher would remain in her home until the end of her life. Divorced from Nicole's father early on, Josephine raised Nicole as a single mother, while teaching and pursuing activist causes in Philadelphia.

According to Nicole, "She was a trail blazer; a fiercely independent woman; as one of the original members of the Divine Nine Black Sororities and Fraternities in the country, she was always working to advance the rights of women and African Americans." Unfortunately, as Josephine grew older, Nicole struggled to take care of her mother at home, even with assistance.

Nicole explains, "The quality of her care at home was just not what I wanted it to be. I was constantly juggling the responsibilities of my career, my husband's business, and my teenage sons' needs, while trying to manage her care. At one point last year, the situation became untenable."

"There were constant scheduling difficulties; people didn't show up for their shifts, or some just didn't do their job, and my mother's hygiene suffered as a result," elaborates Nicole. One day, after discovering that her

mother's diaper had not been changed in days, Nicole was at her wits end. "I contacted a former corporate associate to find out where her elderly mother resided, and she told me that her mother lived happily at Artman in Ambler."

Nicole promptly visited Artman, which is very close to her home, and the environment delighted her. "The cleanliness impressed me, as I am very sensitive to odors. I was amazed by how caringly and supportively the staff and household teams treat the residents," claims Nicole. "This fantastic community offers so many services, activities, and celebratory events that as soon as MaryAnn told me there was an opening I took it; my mother moved in within days," says Nicole.

Since moving to Artman, Josephine has made a new best friend. "It has given me peace of mind to know that my mother enjoys good companionship, that she is treated with respect and concern, and that she has the opportunity to enjoy the community of her household at mealtimes. Her being safe, secure, and well cared for, has made an enormous difference in the quality of her daily life, and in mine," asserts Nicole.



# A Model for Recovery and Resilience

Community and the relationships that connect them become crucial catalysts to the work of Lutheran Disaster Response – Eastern PA (LDR-EPA). Such was the case when Tropical Storm Isaias devastated the community of Eastwick, a neighborhood in southwest Philadelphia, in August of 2020.

Flooding and high winds damaged many homes. Roofs were blown off. People lost everything on the first floor of their homes as two feet of water settled into their living rooms. The water covered cars. One resident described the streets outside as looking more like white water rapids.

Immediately after the storm, volunteers from across the region and beyond came in to help survivors clear debris and muck out basements. Next would come the work of long-term recovery for those affected.

However, LDR-EPA and our partners in PAVOAD (Pennsylvania Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster) did not have a relationship with the community of Eastwick to begin that work. To overcome the obstacle, flood survivors, community leaders from Eastwick, and leaders from PAVOAD were brought together by Philadelphia’s Office of Emergency Management.

The groups began meeting together in October 2020. With winter only weeks away, everyone expressed concerns for survivors in the hope of finding a path



*Above: Stacy assured residents of Eastwick that they were not forgotten.*



*Left: Victor Jackson, Eastwick Community Development Corporation, and volunteers making repairs in Eastwick, summer 2023.*

forward for Eastwick residents who were far from making a solid recovery.

Eastwick leaders were crucial in helping LDR-EPA and our partners get answers to questions about who was impacted, what the needs were, and the nature of resources of the community. Together we discovered that there were needs for 26 heaters, about half as many hot water heaters, and a lot of plumbing, electrical, and construction repair work.

The group would eventually form the Eastwick Unmet Needs Roundtable (EUNR) in winter of 2021. Since then, the work of the EUNR helped forty-plus families return to a normal life. Its work on TS Isaias culminated in a celebration on October 14, 2023, at Heinz National Refuge, to look back on our work together and share stories of recovery with survivors.

The community leaders, through the Eastwick United Community Development Corporation (EUCDC), will now transition to building resilience in the community and mitigating against future disasters. In Berks County, where summer floods devastated communities, they plan to help folks by offering their expertise and sharing their stories.

LDR-EPA is very grateful to be connected with the community of Eastwick in southwest Philadelphia. Their hospitality, faith, and hope inspire everyone blessed to work with them.



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