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COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Denis' Pantry celebrates one year

Nonprofit serves the needs of grandparents raising grandchildren

By Peg DeGrassa
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Editor of Town Talk, News & Press of Delaware County



Volunteer Pixie Hunter, left, of Norwood goes over Baby Pantry inventory with GSU President Karen Barnes of Drexel Hill.

HAVERTOWN » “We’ve been blessed, blessed, blessed...,” Karen Barnes, of Drexel Hill, says as her voice trails off and her eyes glance around the room. She shakes her head in wonder, never ceasing to be amazed by the outpouring of generosity from the community. Barnes is at Denis’s Closet inside Llanerch Hills Chapel in Havertown, where she can be found on almost any given day of the week. Like the Gospel of the Seven Loaves and Seven Fishes, the good will and donations at Denis’ Closet seem to keep multiplying to feed and to help those in need.

Denis’ Pantry was opened in May of 2020 by the nonprofit Grands Stepping Up, an organization that supports local grandparents and kinship guardians, who are raising their grandchildren primarily due to the opioid epidemic, incarceration, mental health, death, or chronic illness. GSU offers private and community support and assistance to grandfamilies because they aren’t able to receive the same services or assistance from government agencies, as foster or adoptive parents often are.

In May 2020, GSU partnered with Llanerch Hills Chapel, a

non-denominational Christian church, to have a stable location where grandparents raising their grandchildren could come for support and to get items that they needed, but often had difficulty in affording.

“That’s what the Bible is all about — meeting people where their needs are,” Mike Emge, the Pastor of Llanerch Hills Chapel explained. “The members of our congregation have really embraced this ministry as we’ve watched it grow in the past year.”

The one-year-old Denis’ Pantry is stocked with donated items so when a grandparent is in need, they have somewhere to turn. “Grandparents are usu-

ally not prepared when they find themselves in the role of parent for their grandkids,” Barnes, the president and founder of GSU who is raising her own grandchildren, said. “All of a sudden, they need to buy groceries, school supplies, diapers, etc. and many of them are on a fixed income so they need help. This is where Denis’ Pantry comes in.”

Barnes told the story about a grandparent who called her up, seeking assistance, this past January. She had one hour to get up to Pottstown before Children and Youth Services put her 5-month-old grandchild into foster care. When she got there, CYS handed her a few scant items and wished her luck.

“That’s the way it is,” Barnes said sadly. “One day you are a grandparent, and the next day you’re a parent.”

According to a recent report from the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, grandparents are caring for approximately 7.5 percent of all children in the state. Over 20 percent of these grandparents are living below the poverty level.

With the pantry now in full operation, GSU is able to serve the most immediate needs of grandfamilies, as well as other struggling Delaware County residents by providing food, clothing, gently used toys and books, diapers, wipes, paper products, toiletries

and more, as well as baby gear, and furniture like cribs, rocking chairs, and small household goods. At least 15,000 pounds of food are given out every single Saturday at the pantry.

“Saturdays are dynamic days here,” Barnes shared. “The pandemic forced so many people into unexpected need, that we expanded the mission of Denis’ Pantry to help others in the community who needed help during this time.”

Pastor Mike Emge of Llanerch Hills Chapel offered the space to GSU, not only for the food pantry but also to hold meetings of commonality support for the grandparents and grandchildren. The chapel also has the space for GSU’s trauma clinic counselors and legal clinic committee members to meet with their clients.

In the state of Pennsylvania alone, nearly 202,000 children live in households headed by grandparents or other relatives.

“There are unique needs that arise in this complicated family dynamic,” Barnes explained. “I, for one, was unaware of how common the grandfamily had become until it hit home. I’ve known families of similar dynamics but never would have been able to understand even a percentage of the unique circumstances they possess until it was an aspect of my own life.”

More than 80,000 grandparents are responsible for meeting the basic needs of their grandchildren. Grandparents and other relative guardians/caregivers, not only prevent their grandchildren from going into the foster care system, they help children thrive by keeping them loved, safe, and in surroundings familiar to them.

DENIS » PAGE C2



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Denis

FROM PAGE C1

Barnes, who founded GSU in January 2020, said the organization has been blessed by individuals, community organizations, and local businesses who continually help to stock Denis' Pantry with everything from toys, toiletries, and bikes to baby equipment, diapers, groceries and children's clothing. Thanks to the generosity of the community and local businesses, at least three large rooms and two hallways at Denis' Pantry are lined with much-needed items.

During the recent pandemic, Denis' Pantry collaborated with Delco Food Project to provide food for the large need in the Delaware County community. GSU, a 501c3 nonprofit, was very appreciative to receive donations from food drives held by Haverford Township Education Foundation, Haverford Township Recreation, Upper Darby Fire Department, Haverford YMCA



GSU President Karen Barnes, left, stands with her daughter Chelsea Barnes, vice president of GSU and manager of Denis' Pantry.

and others. "The kindness of people overwhelms us," Barnes commented. "If we see a need, we put it out there and we always somehow get it. God is good."

Barnes named the pantry after her beloved

brother Denis Schwerdtfeger who died on April 17 last year. Her brother Denis had special needs and Barnes wanted his legacy to live on and inspire others, in the way that Denis and his innocence and love inspired her. Last Sunday,

volunteers, donors, and the grandparents who participate in GSU, along with their grandchildren, came to Llanerch Hills for a barbecue and to gather together to celebrate the first anniversary of Denis' Pantry.

GSU is a tight supportive network, which not only fulfills grandfamilies' material needs, but also offers them a supportive network that is very often a lifeline. Grands Stepping Up supports grandfamilies financially, psychologically, legally, and socially. The organization also provides education to physicians, school districts and others about the complexity of the grandfamilies' needs, which are often overlooked and misunderstood.

Additionally, GSU provides a legal clinic for their grand/kin families, to aid with issues such as custody, adoption, landlord/tenant, real estate, criminal, and others. In its first year, the GSU Legal Clinic provided legal aid for 15-20 kinship families' cases.

"All calls come into my office, but I farm out the cases if I am unable to handle the case," explained Kathryn Meloni, Esq., the director of the GSU legal clinic. "We have approximately 15 attorneys on call



SUBMITTED PHOTO

GSU founder Karen Barnes named Denis's Pantry after her beloved brother Denis Schwerdtfeger, who died last April from COVID-19. She wants the pantry to be a legacy of all the goodness that her special brother brought into this world.

and ready to go, and if there is an area of law where we do not have an attorney on the list, I will find someone. The way it works is that we provide discounts of between 20-30%, depending on the income of the client. The goal is for the organization to grow enough in the future, where GSU can pay the legal fees."

One of the most important aspects of GSU is their trauma-based family counseling program that assists in dealing with the plethora of mental health/behavioral issues of the grandchildren, such as adjustment disorders, depression and anxiety that may accompany the children as they adjust to a new family unit and continue living with one. Ten families are currently receiving trauma therapy. Coordinated by Beth Tyson, the trauma program has three licensed therapists on the team: Jennifer Toof, Andrea Server and Season Apple.

"Everyone here takes a holistic approach," Barnes explained. "These youth (the grandchildren) are not deserving of where they landed because of someone else's transgressions."

"With our counseling program, we are trying to get in front of any problems, not behind them," Tyson added.

Knowing how holidays

can bring on extra sadness and anxiety for children without their parents, GSU also recently instituted a holiday program, with special attention to Easter, Thanksgiving, Christmas, as well as a birthday club. There's a birthday room at Denis' Pantry, full of toys and gift wrap, where grandparents can choose new toys for the birthday celebrant, as well as pick up a full kit to bake a special birthday cake. Last Thanksgiving, GSU provided 175 families with full turkey dinners and last Christmas, 275 families were gifted. Gifts of toys, clothes and more were provided for 650 children.

In continuing with its holistic approach, GSU is also branching out in trying to engage the children of the families it helps. Thanks to Sarah Zulueta and the Kiwanis Club of the Main Line, a Garden Club for youth and other activities will enrich the grandchildren's summer experience this year and enhance their mental health.

GSU has also started a Youth Activity program to support the social desires of the grandchildren to participate in sports, dance, theater, gymnastics, and other areas of personal enrichment. The fund will be created to pay for fees and equipment for each particular experience.

"The assistance Grands Stepping Up provides to grand families in need is a valuable resource that so many people have come to rely on," said state Rep. Mike Zabel, D-163 of Upper Darby, who Barnes said has been a great resource for GSU. "Helping the non-profit grow and thrive over this past year amid a global pandemic, has been important and satisfying work. Karen Barnes and her team have built a large network of care that has provided countless meals, clothing donations and other essential services, which will last for years to come."

GSU also has a special emergency fund set up for any grandfamily in danger

DENIS » PAGE C3

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Some of the team members of Grands Stepping Up, standing by the plethora of food donations to help grandfamilies, are, left to right, Llanerch Hills Chapel Pastor Mike Emge, volunteers John Hunter and Pixie Hunter, President Karen Barnes, and board member Beth Tyson.

Denis

FROM PAGE C2

of losing electric, heat, water, or in danger of eviction. Funds will be approved on a case-by-case basis, depending on the request.

Barnes is quick to point out that GSU receives no formal government funding, but instead relies on the generosity of the community and their monetary and in-kind donations. Help comes from numerous sources, including Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, the Leming Family, and the Community's Foundation.

Volunteers Pixie and John Hunter of Norwood, who were on the receiving end of GSU's aid when they came to the organization for advice, quickly turned around to the giving end. John now drives around the county to pick up donations for GSU four to five times each week,

as well as coordinates all other transportation of donations. Over just the past year alone, GSU received over \$500,000 worth of in-kind donations.

Pixie helps Chelsea Barnes run the Baby Pantry, which is stocked with everything from formula and diapers to equipment and wipes, and she also helps with GSU fundraising and solicits donations.

She holds raffles on big items that are donated. The raffles usually yield \$500-\$1000. Last week, she raffled off a package that included a barbecue donated by Home Depot, Concord, table and chairs donated by Home Depot, Ridley, a terrarium donated by Gardner's Landscape & Nursery in Chester Springs, a \$50 gift card donated by Colonial Village, and a wreath and flower pot donated by Joyce Calabrese. Proceeds benefited the recently formed Youth Activities Program.

As the drug epidemic

and other society woes climb, the need for organizations like GSU continues to grow. Barnes said GSU has 2,500-plus followers on their Facebook page and she hears from grandparents, from as far away as Canada. Barnes and Tyson, who were included recently in a discussion with U.S. Rep. Mary Gay Scanlan, D-5 of Swarthmore, about a bill addressing this issue, said that only giving food, clothing and other items to grandfamilies is like sticking a very loose band-aid on a much larger problem. That's why, Barnes said, their holistic approach is so vitally important.

It definitely takes a village to make GSU operate smoothly. In addition to Pastor Emge, the Hunters, Meloni, and a host of other volunteers too numerous to mention, President Barnes is assisted by an executive committee of Chelsea

DENIS » PAGE C4



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Denis

FROM PAGE C3

Barnes, Randi Kobielnik, Stella Economidis-Stefanidis, and Lauren Ferrarelli as well as board members Roe Lohr, state Rep. David Dellosa, D-162 of Ridley Park, Kathy Kerns, Maria Kollar, Zabel, county District Attorney Jack Stollsteimer, Rob Yannuzzi, Jason Otis, Bobbi Arnot, Annie Gramiak, Betty Barnes, Jenn Casey, Gwen McCullough, Beth Tyson, Lisa Riggan, and Amie Cannon.

Volunteer Mary Eileen Johnston of Havertown said, "I volunteer at Denis' Pantry because it gives me goosebumps seeing how many people we help each week."

One local grandmother raising her two grandsons, who asked to remain anonymous, said, "Grands Stepping Up has really helped me over the last year. They assisted me with a good portion of the deposit for my house rental, helped with some bills, and paid for car repairs as well as inspection. I am so grateful to GSU."

Randi Kobielnik, one of Barnes' five daughters, released a statement on behalf of herself and her four sisters Brittany, Chelsea, Amanda and Michelle: "Congratulations to Grands Stepping Up for a year of remarkable growth in membership, effectiveness, vision, service, and credibility. We are still young but have come such a long way this first year! We want to salute our mother and founder/president of GSU, Karen Barnes, for her community outreach and evolving activism, her effectiveness, and her uncompromising commitment to her vision of holistic service for grandfamilies everywhere. She is an inspiration to all of us who have labored at her side this past year. GSU will continue to be a lifeline for so many grandfamilies with our



PEG DEGRASSA - MEDIANEWS GROUP

Volunteer Mary Eileen Johnston drops off donations last week to Denis' Pantry. She gladly got involved as a volunteer in Grands Stepping Up because she is raising her 1-year-old grandson, Ben, so she can fully understand the situation of other grandparents who turn to GSU for support.

abilities are endless!"

Although the community has been extremely generous, Pastor Emge said they are always in need of more paper products, laundry and dish detergent, kid-friendly foods, juices, and cleaning products. Barnes is always looking for more volunteers, so GSU can help even more grandfamilies. She dreams of extending the organization to other counties and states where the need is as great as it is in Delaware County.

"I am so humbled to be a part of such an amazing team here at GSU," Barnes said. "Denis' Pantry is such a legacy to my brother. I know he is smiling down on us. If I hadn't said 'yes' to parenting my grandchild a few years back, none of this would have happened. I am challenging others to just say 'yes' to getting involved

or to helping others. Saying that one simple word 'yes' can change lives and make a big difference."

To volunteer or to donate food, diapers, or other items, or to find out what items are needed, people can reach out to Chelsea Barnes, 267-600-7493, Karen Barnes, 610-355-6362, or Llanerch Hills Chapel, 484-995-3409.

Denis' Pantry is open to drop off donations from 6-8:30 p.m. Wednesdays and Thursdays. The Pantry is open to clients for pick-up Thursdays, from 6-8:30 p.m. and Saturdays, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. For more information on Grands Stepping Up, or for confidential advice or help, visit <https://www.facebook.com/GrandsSteppingUp> or visit <https://grandssteppingupinfo.com>.

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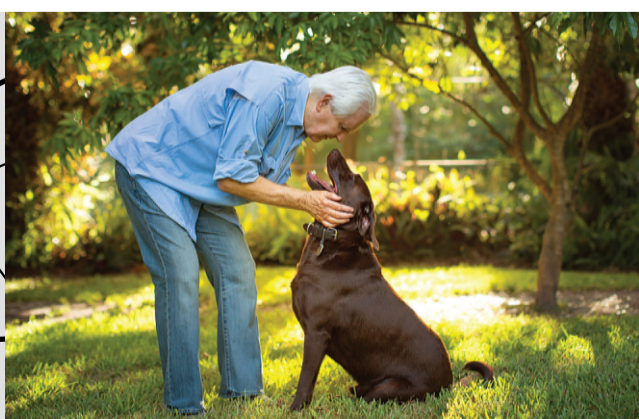
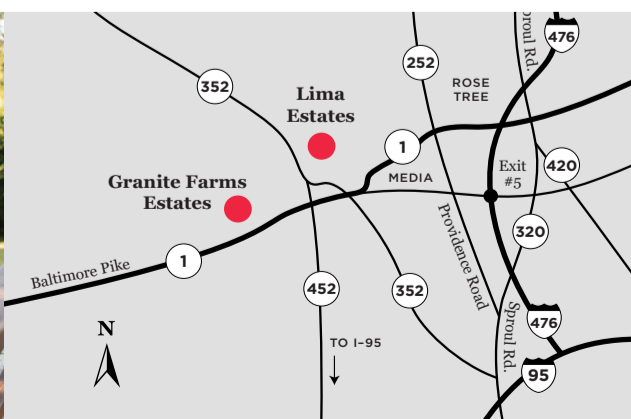


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HEALTH

Alzheimer's and Brain Awareness Month



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PEOPLEIMAGES

June is Alzheimer's and Brain Awareness Month.

By Shelley Kanther
Griswold Home Care

June is Alzheimer's and Brain Awareness Month.

According to a recent report from the Alzheimer's Association, more than 6 million Americans are living with the disease. What's more, multiple studies have been conducted to research the connection between COVID-19, Alzheimer's and cognitive decline.

The pandemic has taken a heavy toll on those with Alzheimer's and their families. A CDC review showed that COVID-19 caused an increase in the risk of illness or death due to other comorbidities.

The Alzheimer's Association highlights that during the pandemic there were more than 42,000 more deaths due to Alzheimer's and other dementias as compared to the average number of deaths over the previous five years, a 16% increase.

The pandemic has placed stress on all of us. Families had to socially distance from their loved ones, especially older adults. Retirement communities and senior centers were forced to shut down, and many health and senior care professionals have noticed a decline in cognitive ability among the aging population due to social isolation and lack of stimulating activities.

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Meanwhile, we provide resources and activities that are designed to slow the progress of cognitive disorders so that each client can age in place in the security and comfort of their own homes.

As we continue to observe Alzheimer's and Brain Awareness Month, here are some things that family members can look out for when it comes to monitoring the health of their loved ones.

- Memory loss that disrupts daily life
- Challenges in planning or solving problems
- Difficulty when completing familiar tasks when at home
- Confusion with time or place
- Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relations
- New problems with words when speaking or writing
- Misplacing things or losing the ability to retrace steps
- Withdrawal from work or activities

Changes in mood or personality

The decline of a loved one can be a scary and confusing time. If you notice some of the changes above, you may want to consider speaking to a health professional. You don't have to walk this journey alone. Organizations are out there with the resources, technology, care, and support to help.

About Griswold Home Care: With 168 locations in 29 states, Griswold Home Care is one of the country's top home care companies, delivering compassionate care 24/7 to its clients. Its purpose is to give people the help they need to live in the place they love. Through this purpose, Griswold Home Care helps adults maintain quality of life despite advanced age or onset of illness through services including companion care, home services, personal care and respite care. Founded by the late Jean Griswold in 1982, the company has maintained its founder's profound sense of empathy for older and disabled adults and those living with chronic conditions. For more information, visit www.griswoldhomecare.com or call 215.402.0200.

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SENIOR LIFE

Rose Tree Place has much awaited outing



COURTESY OF ROSE TREE PLACE

Judy Dellaratta, left, and Peg DeCenzi, residents of Rose Tree Place, sip tea at the Painted Tea Cup during the first outing organized by their retirement community in over a year.



Rose Tree Place residents celebrate their first community-organized trip in over a year to the Painted Tea Cup.

Rose Tree Place

Last month, a small group of vaccinated residents from Rose Tree Place, a Watermark Retirement Community in Upper Providence Township, Delaware County, enjoyed their first group outing since the start of the pandemic.

The celebration included high tea, treats and shop-

ping in the Painted Tea Cup tea house in Upper Darby.

With an added layer of protection provided by the COVID-19 vaccine, Rose Tree Place has cautiously begun filling residents' calendars with opportunities for increased engagement and activity.

The outing to the Painted Tea Cup marked some of the first steps toward restoring the vibrant life-

styles so many Rose Tree Place residents cherish.

"This is a huge moment for both residents and associates of Rose Tree Place," said Community Life Director Karen Holahan. "Our community is known for our outings and events, and we are excited to get back to treating our residents to new experiences and occasions to reconnect."

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DAYLESFORD CROSSING

Daylesford Crossing hires new director of community relations

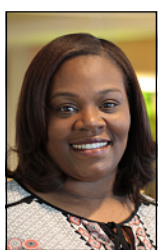
SageLife

Daylesford Crossing, SageLife's innovative senior living community in Paoli, Chester County, has named Denise Cleveland director of community relations.

Cleveland will focus on sales and outreach efforts to seniors and their families interested in Daylesford Crossing's customizable lifestyle and care offerings, which include independent living, supportive care, restorative stays and memory care.

With nearly a decade of experience in senior living, Cleveland's professional roles have spanned long-term care and assisted living, having worked as a care manager for Senior Helpers, as director of marketing and

admissions at Kadima Rehabilitation & Nursing and as director of community relations/PC admissions at Simpson House Retirement Community.



Cleveland

"I am passionate about tailoring solutions to individual residents' needs."

Denise Cleveland

"I am passionate about tailoring solutions to individual residents' needs," she said. "At Daylesford Crossing, the residences, the lifestyle and the wellness opportunities are all designed around residents' desires, which truly makes this senior living community unique."

Cleveland earned a bachelor's degree in business and a

master's degree in healthcare administration from Fairleigh Dickinson University in Madison, N.J. In her free time, she enjoys baking, especially when she's in the kitchen with her three children.

For more information about Daylesford Crossing, visit www.daylesfordcrossing.com.



COURTESY OF DAYLESFORD CROSSING

During National Nurses Week, residents at Daylesford Crossing showed their appreciation for the senior living community's nurses by presenting them with flowers. William "Doc" Stevens gave a bouquet to Brandi Carl, a nurse.

SENIOR LIVING

SageLife names John Watson as its chief financial officer

SageLife

SageLife, a Springfield-based owner and operator of active lifestyle, retirement and supportive senior living communities, has named John Watson chief financial officer.

With nearly 30 years of increasingly senior-level experience in a variety of industries, Watson brings deep expertise in cross-functional financial leadership to the sophisticated senior living community that enables residents to live life on their terms.

In this role, Watson will be responsible for the day-to-day financial management of the company, with a focus on bud-

get management, cost benefit analysis, forecasting and the securing of new funding. In collaboration with the senior leadership team, he will provide strategic, financial and programmatic support to further expand the organization.

"I am excited to play a senior-level role in SageLife's flexible and innovative culture," Watson said. "SageLife is forward-thinking, and I look forward to diving in and working with the team here to enhance financial outcomes and build an even stronger organization that encourages, empowers, and celebrates successful aging."

Watson most recently served as vice president and controller with GENESIS Healthcare Co., where he led all shared accounting functions for the organization's senior nursing facility healthcare business segment, as well as its physical

rehabilitation services, physician provider services, respiratory health services, and healthcare human resource placement services businesses.

"John is a financial leader with a diverse background and the skill sets we need to help us grow," said SageLife founder and president Kelly Andress. "Not just a numbers person, he will be fully integrated into our business, driving operations through the lens of financial results and influencing near and long-term strategic planning."

A Lean Six Sigma Green Belt, Watson earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from Shippensburg University and a master's of business administration from St. Joseph's University.

For more information about SageLife and its communities, visit www.sagelife.com.



Watson



Daylesford Crossing resident Grace Lahiff, right, gives a bouquet to Health and Wellness Director Mindy Clark to thank her during National Nurses Week.



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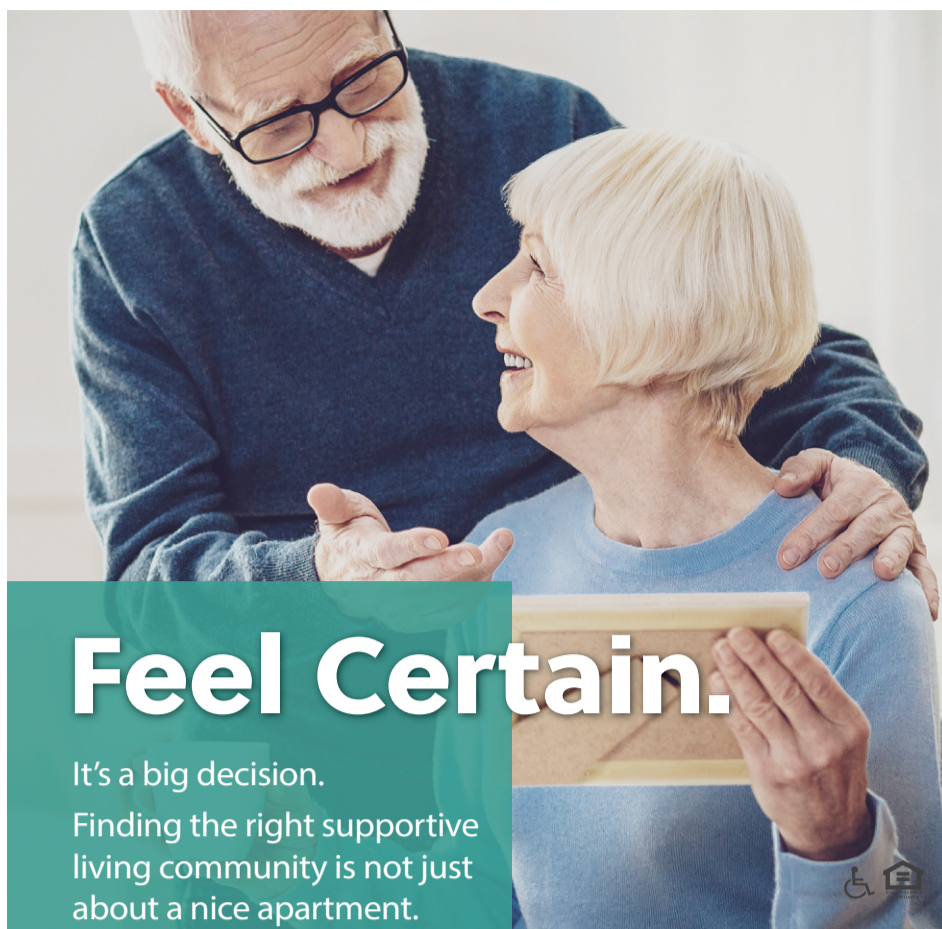
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INTERNATIONAL TEA DAY

Heritage of Green Hills throws pop-up Mad Hatter Tea Party



Heritage of Green Hills resident wears a Green Gardner Hat.



COURTESY OF THE HERITAGE OF GREEN HILLS

Heritage of Green Hills residents, from left: Ellen Laincz, Paul Laincz, Ruth Shaffer, Deb McCone and Susan Rothenberger wearing hats for the Mad Hatter Tea Party.



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Heritage of Green Hills

To celebrate the recent International Tea Day, the Heritage of Greens Hills threw a pop-up Mad Hatter Tea Party, complete with ice tea, snacks, games and crazy hats.

"We've been throwing unexpected pop-up parties all spring, and we'll continue into the summer," said Cheryl Anderson, director of wellness at the healthy life plan commu-

nity in Cumru Township, Berks County. "There have been many unwanted surprises in all our lives this past year — I thought it would be great if we enjoyed a few happy surprises, too."

Anderson only gave residents a day's warning to grab (or make) their "Finest Mad Hatter's Hat" in preparation for the outdoor celebration, which also featured a large-scale game of "Ice Tea Pong," a more

quaint and genteel take on a certain party game popular on college campuses.

In addition, attendees were challenged to take cards from a "Do Something Kind" deck, which includes suggestions like "Be kind to yourself," "Post three sticky notes of uplifting messages in a public bathroom," "Compliment service people you interact with," and "Slip someone a 'You're Awesome' note."



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FOOD PROGRAM

Wolf administration improves access to senior food box program

MediaNews Group

Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding and Aging Secretary Robert Torres recently joined seniors at King Terrace in Phoenixville to announce steps to increase access to Pennsylvania's Senior Food Boxes, a supplemental food program available free to lower income seniors.

Giving the program a new name and removing proof of income requirements are among the barriers to participation the state is removing, with the goal of encouraging seniors to take advantage of the program.

Formally known as Commodity Supplemental Food Program, the program previously required seniors to provide documented proof of their income when they applied to receive a food box.

The new procedure requires only a statement of income.

"We want to take hunger off the table for Pennsylvania's seniors," Redding said. "They shouldn't be worrying about whether to eat or pay for utilities and prescriptions."

"They've supported their families or communities for a lifetime, and we want to support them now."

"This is why we've removed income verification as a requirement for the Senior Food Box, we want it to be as easy as possible to receive. So now, just indicate on the application form that you are eligible for help and you'll receive it."

The Pennsylvania Senior Food Box is a product of the federally funded Commodity Supplemental Food Program. It works to improve the health of low-



COURTESY OF COMMONWEALTH MEDIA SERVICES

Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding and Sheila Christopher, executive director of Hunger Free Pennsylvania, put a new logo on food boxes for seniors.

income seniors by providing a supplement to groceries of a variety of nutritious, shelf-stable products including shelf-stable fluid milk, juice, ready-to-eat cereal, rice, pasta, dry beans, peanut butter, canned meat, poultry, or fish, and canned fruits and vegetables.

The Senior Food Box is a perfect supplement to other food assistance programs in Pennsylvania such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Pennsylvania Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program, which provides seniors with fresh, Pennsylvania-grown fruits and vegetables from summer through fall.

More than 300,000 Pennsylvania seniors are eligible for the Pennsylvania Senior Food Box, but only about 35,000 are enrolled

to receive it this year. Seniors often face barriers to access for food assistance programs such as mobility, technology and stigma.

This food box program aims to overcome those barriers by being available for drop off or drive through in addition to pick up and, now, by reducing stigma and red tape with the removal of income verification requirements.

"Supporting older adults with the nutritious foods they need requires us to understand the challenges they face in their daily lives and provide options to overcome these challenges," Torres said. "We want seniors to have sufficient food and a stable meal routine that enables good health, independence and a positive quality of life."

"I am pleased to support the Department of Agri-

culture's efforts to make this important food assistance program more accessible, and I urge eligible seniors to take advantage of it through the many options available."

Food insecurity and hunger can have harmful impacts on the health and well-being of older adults. Poor food intake can cause nutrition deficiencies that increase disease risk or worsen existing conditions. Consuming fewer calories and nutrients can also decrease independence and the ability to remain home without assistance.

State Senator Carolyn Comitta, member of the Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee and supporter of the Chester County Food Bank, joined Redding and Torres at King Terrace.

"It's vital that senior cit-

izens can easily access nutritious food to help ensure their health, well-being, independence, and happiness," Comitta said. "This program is another tool we have to combat hunger among seniors. Seniors should know that food boxes are readily available and safely accessible in their communities."

Pennsylvania's Senior Food Box Program is administered on behalf of the Department of Agriculture by Hunger-Free Pennsylvania through their network of 17 food banks serving all 67 counties. Once signed up, eligible seniors can choose to receive their monthly box via pick up, drive-through or delivery from a program partner including senior apartment complexes, senior community centers and food pantries.

"Seniors are the greatest generation," said execu-

tive director of Hunger-Free Pennsylvania Sheila Christopher. "They survived the Great Depression of the '30s, World War II and the Korean War. Now, hundreds of thousands find themselves without enough food on their table. The PA Senior Food Box is available to help. Help us help them."

The Senior Food Box is available for anyone age 60 or above whose household income is at or below 130% of the U.S. poverty level. That totals \$16,744 annually for a household of one, or \$22,646 for a household of two.

To apply, seniors may call 800-468-2433 to be directed to the regional food bank distributing the Senior Food Box in their county. Or go online at agriculture.pa.gov/senior-foodbox and fill out the Senior Food Box Application Form.



Among Friends

with Faith C. Woodward
Director of Admission and Marketing

PLAY BALL!

Think of any athletic activity and there is probably a senior sports league for it. Little League isn't so little anymore. The National Senior Games Association, also known as NSGA, is a non-profit organization designed to encourage older adults to get out, play, socialize, and get or stay healthy. It was formed in 1985 and anyone over the age of 50 can participate. There are leagues for different sports, and games are held twice a year, with as many as 19 different events varying from archery to cycling. Thousands of older adults participate and reap the many benefits ranging from meeting new friends, traveling to the venues, and enjoying a more active lifestyle.

Many adults over the age of 65 spend several hours a day either sitting or laying down, and this lack of activity can cause aches and pains when doing simple things such as walking. Taking part in sport and fitness activities on a weekly basis is important for everyone! The staff at BARCLAY FRIENDS adapts activities to fit the varying physical and cognitive abilities of each resident. We invite you to visit our community

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D-DAY

'Proud of the job we did'

Berks man aboard Navy ship during Normandy invasion



COURTESY OF KENNETH KERN

Kenneth Kern was in his senior year at Kutztown High School when he was drafted in February 1944, then served aboard Navy LST-25 on D-Day, June 6, 1944.



RON DEVLIN — READING EAGLE

Kenneth Kern, 95, of Kutztown with a model of LST-25, the Navy ship he served aboard during the invasion of Normandy on D-Day, June 6, 1944.

By Ron Devlin
rdevlin@readingeagle.com
@rondevlinre on Twitter

In less than ideal weather, Navy LST-25 left its berth in Southampton and slipped quietly into the English Channel at 7:30 a.m. on June 6, 1944.

On board was an 18-year-old kid from Kutztown, Kenneth K. Kern, who stood on the precipice of history.

Within a half-hour or so, RM3 Kern would plunge headlong into one of the most memorable military chapters in U.S. history: the D-Day invasion of Normandy.

Manning one of the ship's 40 mm anti-aircraft guns, young Kern would fire volley after volley onto Gold Beach in support of British troops taking part in the invasion by Allied forces.

Seventy-seven years later, 95-year-old Kern reflected on that fateful day and the two years and three months he spent aboard LST-25.

In the 2½ months following D-Day, Kern would make 23 crossings of the English Channel, helping to

deliver tanks, trucks, jeeps, ammunition and troops to replenish the invasion force in northern France.

"I always like to say that we were in the trucking business," Kern said. "I'm very proud of the job we did in supplying our troops in combat."

No graduation

Kern was in his senior year at Kutztown High School when in February 1944, Uncle Sam pointed and said, "I want you." With two others, Dick Bierly and Mark Luckenbill, Kern was pulled out of high school. None of the three draftees, all of whom chose the Navy, got to graduate with the Class of 1944.

Indeed, as his classmates were receiving diplomas, Kern was actively involved in the war effort aboard LST-25.

Kern had never heard of a Navy LST, which stands for Landing Ship Tank, but would soon become familiar with its history.

At the request of British Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill, the U.S. designed

a ship capable of transporting tanks, trucks and other heavy vehicles during amphibious operations.

The result was the LST, a 327-foot, flat-bottomed ship whose bow was a large door that could open onto a beach. Sometimes called the workhorse of the Navy, more than a thousand were built during the war.

In a memoir, Churchill said the LST made perhaps the single greatest contribution to the stubborn problem of landing heavy vehicles on beaches during combat operations.

D-Day revisited

Sitting behind stacks of papers, documents and photographs in his Kutztown home, Kern revisited his role in the D-Day invasion.

The crew had known something big was up. Every bit of LST-25's more than 4,000-ton capacity was occupied by combat vehicles of every size and shape.

Shortly after leaving Southampton, the captain

PROUD » PAGES 5

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THE INVASION
The crew had known something big was up. Every bit of LST-25's more than 4,000-ton capacity was occupied by combat vehicles of every size and shape. Shortly after leaving Southampton, the captain

Courtesy of Notes from memoir of aboard Na the invas on D-Day,

Proud

FROM PAGE D4

assembled the crew of the LST-25.

“He rolled out a large map on a table,” Kern recalled. “And he showed us where we were going to land.”

Kern, who was 18 at the time, gave little thought to the potential danger that lay ahead.

“You didn’t think much about it,” he recalled. “You just did your job.”

Nearing Normandy, the sound of heavy shelling from Allied ships farther out in the channel permeated the air.

Kern, who had been feeding ammunition to a 20 mm gun, was ordered to sit in as gunner of a 40 mm gun. The twin-barreled gun, which fires about 120 rounds a minute, is manned by two gunners.

Approaching Gold Beach, the middle of five designated landing areas, LST-25 opened her doors and tanks, trucks and members of the British 50th Infantry Division took to the beach.

The enormity of what LST-25 had done on D-Day wouldn’t sink in until months later when the ship was on its way to the Pacific Theater.

From a stack of papers, Kern pulled a typewritten paper with some handwritten notes at the bottom. A few feet from an encased scale model of LST-25, he read:

“When we left the Panama Canal on the Pacific side, the executive officer made an announcement that in the 2 ½-month period after the June 6, 1944, invasion of Normandy we transported 1,500 vehicles and 4,000 army personnel.”

“Just hearing the numbers made us feel good,” Kern recalled. “We were proud as hell.”

On to the Pacific

When the war ended in Europe on May 2, 1945, V-E Day, LST-25 was dry docked in Boston and the crew was given a 30-day furlough.

Kern, then a radio operator, was among the crew that remained on the ship.

In the remaining months of the war, LST-25 would see action in the Philippines, Iwo Jima and Okinawa.

Not only did the crew battle the Japanese, they faced horrific storms.

In a typhoon off the coast of China, Kern swears the flat-bottomed ship was airborne.

“The water beneath us dropped so fast,” he says, “for a few seconds you could see the sun under the ship.”

Kern was not yet 21 years old when he was discharged on May 20, 1946.

He returned to Kutztown and worked for 44 years in sales and management at Suburban Propane, now in Temple.



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