

ART

PORTRAIT OF AN ARTIST

West Lawn resident John Dusko, 88, celebrates new Yocum Institute exhibition

By Jon Fassnacht
 jfassnacht@readingeagle.com
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Recovering from a broken hip, John Dusko wasn't able to see his new exhibit at the Yocum Institute for Arts Education until it opened.

When he finally saw the gallery, prepared by his sons, he was knocked over.

"I couldn't believe it was all my work," the 88-year-old West Lawn resident said. "There it was. And I said to my son, 'Tony, did I do all that?' He said, 'You sure did.'"

The more than 50 pieces in the show spotlight Berks County places, people and wildlife: Gring's Mill and Blue Marsh recreation areas, the Astor Theatre, covered bridges, farm fields, train workers, a couple relaxing by a tree-lined path and much more.

"I like to just drive around, or if I know of a certain place that might have possibilities, I'll go there and just look at it for a while and take pictures," Dusko said. "And if a thing grabs me, then I know I have to paint that particular composition. I do try to put real feeling into the paintings so when people look at it, they feel what I felt."

The exhibit, which opened in early July at the Spring Township academy, runs through Aug. 20. Admission is free. Masks are still required for guests.

"We are fortunate to have an exhibit by such a talented artist who excels in everything he does," said Susan Rohn, Yocum's executive director. "Walking through the gallery is a walk down memory lane



COURTESY OF TONY DUSKO

ARTIST » PAGE 2 John Dusko with one of the pieces included in the Yocum Institute exhibit.



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John Dusko's paintings celebrate the places, people and wildlife of Berks County.

Artist

FROM PAGE 1

from exquisite Berks County landscapes and cityscapes to the charming portraits and still lifes."

Dusko has been painting for over 75 years. Growing up in Pottstown, it was the only thing he wanted to do. He was aided in that journey by professional artist George "Bucky" Walters, who opened up a studio in

town. Dusko became one of his first students.

"From that day on, wow, that was it," he said. "And I just painted."

He then enrolled in the School of Visual Arts in New York City, where he studied illustration. He remembers thinking that if he got married and had children, he almost certainly wouldn't be able to support them on paintings alone, so he decided to focus on commercial art.

His life detoured after

graduation, when he was drafted into the armed forces for the Korean War. After leaving the service, he spent the next few decades in the corporate world, keeping a foot in artistic endeavors by designing layouts and ad campaigns.

"My art had to take a backseat, which I didn't like," he said, "but in that time I had gotten married and had children, so I had to support them."

As time went by, the desire to return to painting

kept getting stronger; the itch became almost unbearable after he started going to exhibits.

"My son Tony encouraged me to think about really getting into art," he said. "And I was just about nearing retirement age, so I thought: 'Well, why not. I'll retire but I won't retire.'"

"And then I went full steam into fine arts and I haven't stopped since."

It's been many years since Dusko's last exhibit, one of the reasons his son encour-

aged him to take the plunge now. As such, some of the paintings in the Yocum gallery date back over 20 years.

He spends an average of three months completing each of his works, painting about three to four hours a day — "keeps me sharp," he says. Though he's nearing 90, Dusko doesn't plan to hang up his paintbrushes any time soon. He's going to keep it going as long as he can.

"Oh yeah," he said. "There's a lot of work I have to do yet."

IF YOU GO

What: John Dusko Exhibition

Where: Yocum Institute for Arts Education, 3000 Penn Ave., Spring Township, Berks County

Gallery hours: Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Friday, 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.; and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Masks are required.

Exhibit runs through: Aug. 20

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SPOT OF T

Life after a pandemic may leave us with PPTSD

By Terry Alburger

So here we are, emerging from a pandemic, and perhaps one of the most challenging times in our lives. It was a long, scary road, but we made it. So, let me ask you ... how are you feeling?

Speaking for myself, this return to normalcy, as they are calling it, is slow going on a long and daunting road. While part of me wants to jump back into the life I knew pre-COVID, the rest of me says, "Slow down!" Step cautiously. And each step I do manage to take is a little personal victory. Does this sound familiar? If so, you are definitely not alone.

Though I am one of the vaccinated, I still believe in caution. My dad used to always say to face each day with "moderation, intelligence and restraint." It was his mantra, each of his kids and grandkids is well-versed in these words and their meaning thanks to my dad.

Though he couldn't have foreseen this pandemic or its aftereffects, his words resonate with me each day as I face new (and old) situations.

Moderation

As I venture out again,

I am taking it slow. Yes, I am one of those who still wear a mask in stores and other places where I may come in close contact with others. It's not required, but for some reason, it makes me feel a little safer. And I definitely limit my time in stores to a need-be basis.

The same goes for restaurants. Since things have opened up, I have been out for a meal twice. Both times were special occasions, and yes, I wore my mask while not eating. The wait staff also had masks, which made me feel safer.

Intelligence

This one is tougher than it sounds! Oftentimes I want to react with my emotions, my desires and wants. During the early days of the pandemic, I would have loved to have seen my grandchildren, or hung out with friends or had dinner out somewhere. But thinking it through, it was not the right thing to do.

Yes, I love going to the movies, but even before theaters closed, I did not go. Even now, I'm still leery. I will most definitely go back, but it might take me a little longer. Think it through. If the idea of jumping back into an ac-

tivity scares you or makes you nervous, give yourself more time. It's true that time heals (or at least improves) all wounds. But it takes awhile.

Restraint

This one resonated every note with me. We were all stuck at home, and we were all going a bit stir-crazy, I'm sure. But as things open up, I truly try to use restraint in just how fast I get back into the swing of things.

During the pandemic, restraint took a bit of a vacation, as I dug into a pint of ice cream or ate a chocolate bar, not my usual M.O. to be sure. And, like many, I put on the "Pandemic 10," a few extra pounds from the inactivity involved in quarantine combined with the emotional eating of which many of us partook. For myself, I am not the least bit concerned because we all did what we had to in order to get through that unprecedented time.

It is interesting how old habits die hard. Wearing a mask, wearing gloves when I have to touch a public keypad, such as at a gas station or MAC machine, elevator, or grocery store — all things I still do. I avoid door handles wherever possible (Yes, I do have one of those silly



PIXABAY

As we emerge from the pandemic, many of us still feel more comfortable wearing a mask even if it's not required.

hooks for opening doors and pushing elevator buttons and keypads!) and I try to be very conscious of not being too close to others in crowds or public places.

The good news is, little by little, I'm coming around. If my new nor-

mal is just a little more cautious than my old normal, is that a bad thing? I don't think so. I have deemed my post-pandemic way of thinking PPTSD — Pandemic Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

None of us has ever

been in this situation before. Emerging from one of the most trying periods of our lives has us all a little shell shocked. Go easy on yourself. You are doing the absolute best that you can. We'll all get through it all and emerge a little wiser, I think.

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CAREGIVING

What is respite care, and is it right for my family?

By Shelley Kanther
Griswold Home Care

Caring for an elderly or disabled loved one is a noble act that is often carried out by a family member. While it can be extremely rewarding caring for those who raised you, it can also be overwhelming and taxing.

At Griswold Home Care, we run into situations where family caregivers need support: spouses, children, nieces, nephews and others who are seeking a well-deserved break to look after their own well-being. In the coming weeks, millions of individuals and families will venture out on vacation, leaving some to wonder how they can get the best care for their disabled or elderly loved ones if they feel like their family member may no longer be up for the journey.

Respite care can be a solution in these types of situations. It is specifically designed to provide compassionate care while helping the family caregiver recharge, both physically and emotionally, to avoid burnout. Respite care programs, such as those offered by organizations like Griswold Home Care, can provide a temporary break and can last anywhere from a few hours per day to overnight. Some common non-medical tasks caregivers can help with:

- Assistance with personal care, including bathing, dressing and hygiene



COURTESY OF OCSKAY MARK

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- Accompanying clients to the grocery store or doctor appointments
- Assisting with running errands
- Providing companionship to help clients maintain social engagement

It's common for caregivers to feel tested — after all, we are human. In some cases, people are taking care of both children and elderly parents.

When a caregiver finds himself or herself sandwiched between these two roles, they may welcome an opportunity to reset. Other times, a caregiver may become ill or just need a good night's sleep.

Many of our clients have contacted us for emergency respite care when something else requires their attention

last-minute, and we've been happy to step in. Please know that if you're looking for support, there are quality options available. Respite care is not about passing off your caregiving responsibilities — it's about recognizing the need for balance and self-care in your life.

When looking for a respite care program and deciding if it's right for

you and your family, it's important to choose an organization that can nimbly adjust care programs. Family caregivers should look for support with experienced organizations that fully understand that the needs they may have today won't necessarily be their needs in the future — or even tomorrow.

As a loved one ages, they often require

changes to their care plans. Similarly, family caregivers may simply need a few hours of respite care now, but in the future, they may prefer more. This personalized programming is important for both the caregiver and loved one, to ensure both get what they need.

When you're a family-caregiver, it is vital that you look after yourself ... because after all, you can't take care of someone else unless you take care of you first! Next time you need to recharge, just know there are excellent respite care programs available to support you. You're worth it.

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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TECHNOLOGY

Pandemic spurs growth of computer use among seniors

Association of Mature American Citizens

Before the pandemic, seniors were gradually becoming internet users; during the extended COVID lockdown, use of computer technology among older Americans has been accelerating at a faster pace, says Rebecca Weber, CEO of the Association of Mature American Citizens.

"This is good news given the fact that more older citizens are now able to take advantage of benefits they were missing including, but not limited to, online help sites and an array of consumer discounts," she said.

Weber points out that www.amac.us, the association's Website, is chock-full of information of use for its 50-plus membership, offering an array of discount purchasing opportunities ranging from pharmaceuticals to travel services and insurance services.

There are sites that offer social engagement for seniors, allowing us to chat with each other and to attend virtual forums on a variety of topics. Seniors Only Club, for example, allows you to access specialty forums on a wide variety of topics. Signing up is free.

Meanwhile, you don't have to be a patient to visit the Mayo Clinic website, where you can have "access to the knowledge and experience of Mayo Clinic." The Suddenly Senior site also offers health and wellness information as well as senior trivia and senior jokes pages, just for a laugh.

At recipe Websites, such as the allrecipes site, you can look up ways of freely creating your own culi-



PXHERE/ALAN LEVINE

More older Americans became comfortable using computers during the pandemic.

nary masterpieces. And the Duolingo offers free language learning sessions, claiming that you'll "learn a new language in five minutes a day."

The world became a lonely place for many seniors during the self-isolation days of the COVID pandemic, and specialty websites, such as that of the Institute on Aging, offered a modicum of relief.

And if you are a senior citizen who is looking for activities you might enjoy, there is the Vive Health site, which boasts that it offers "110 Activities for Elderly & Seniors."

If you're in the mood for a road trip, long or short, perhaps you can get some help at websites such as Roadtrippers or Outdoors.org. Here some additional sites you might want to explore:

- <https://elder-one-stop.com/> focuses on health and well-being

- <https://www.seniorchatz.com/> is a free chat room that lets you schmooze with new pals and old

- ageinplacetech.com offers news and information for seniors

And, of course, if you feel your computer skills are lacking in some way,

you might want to visit the seniorsguidetocomputers.com, which boasts it offers "the ins and outs of personal computers using simplified terms, examples, pictures and videos actually described in easy-to-understand English." In other words, you won't have to deal with "geek speak."

The 2.3 million member

Association of Mature American Citizens (www.amac.us) is a vibrant, vital senior advocacy organization that takes its marching orders from its members. AMAC Action is a nonprofit, non-partisan organization representing the membership in our nation's capital and in local congressional districts throughout the country.



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TRAVEL

After a long lockdown, here's how to take a safe vacation



PXHERE

Association of Mature American Citizens

Cabin fever is one of the chief side effects of the ongoing COVID pandemic, and it can easily trigger a sudden wanderlust, especially during the summer months. And the urge to roam in the aftermath of strict lockdowns and social distancing procedures can be overwhelming. The question is: if I do take a vacation, how can I protect myself and my family?

"The number one requirement, if you want to stay safe while traveling this summer, is to make sure that you and those traveling with you are fully

vaccinated," said Rebecca Weber, CEO of the Association of Mature American Citizens. "Obviously, it would be wise to also pick a destination that is safe."

Those who took the double doses of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines and the single dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine are considered fully vaccinated two weeks later, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

But it would be wise to consult your physician before booking your trip, especially if you or a member of your travel group suffers from a condition that weakens your immune system.

As for selecting a destination, do your homework by

researching to find the safest places to visit in America or abroad. Your travel agent should be able to help with this task, or you can search the Internet for CDC advice and/or do a search for "COVID safe travel destinations."

And if the purpose of your trip is to visit far away friends and family that you haven't seen in the past year or so during the height of the pandemic, you may want to check with local authorities as regards the status of that particular location.

You may also wish to consider additional trip protection. In addition to making sure that your health insur-

ance will cover you no matter where you travel in the U.S. and abroad, you might want to purchase travel insurance just in case you need to cancel your trip.

It may also be wise to look into purchasing a travel assistance plan as well. There is a difference. Travel assistance plans help pay for things such as an emergency medical evacuation and travel arrangements, a nurse escort, a traveling companion and other emergency costs you might encounter if you get sick or hurt while traveling. It can even provide emergency cash advances.

Wherever you go, whatever you do "continue tak-

ing precautions to protect yourself and others if you must travel," according to the Mayo Clinic.

The fact is that restrictions and conditions can change rapidly, and so it is important to keep abreast of developments as they occur as your travel date nears.

Meanwhile, pay attention to details. For example, the TSA now allows passengers to carry with them hand sanitizer containers as large as 12 ounces. But since such containers are larger than the standard allowance of 3.4 ounces of liquids, it will require a separate screening, which will add time when checking in.

If you're suffering from cabin fever after the long pandemic lockdown, pick a destination that is safe when you decide to travel.

The 2.3 million member Association of Mature American Citizens, www.amac.us, is a vibrant, vital senior advocacy organization that takes its marching orders from its members. AMAC Action is a non-profit, non-partisan organization representing the membership in our nation's capital and in local congressional districts throughout the country.

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HEALTH

Aiding her dying husband, a geriatrician learns the emotional and physical toll of caregiving

By Judith Graham
Kaiser Health News

The loss of a husband. The death of a sister. Taking in an elderly mother with dementia.

This has been a year like none other for Dr. Rebecca Elon, who has dedicated her professional life to helping older adults.

It's taught her what families go through when caring for someone with serious illness as nothing has before.

"Reading about caregiving of this kind was one thing," she said. "Experiencing it was entirely different."

Were it not for the challenges she's faced during the coronavirus pandemic, Elon might not have learned firsthand how exhausting end-of-life care can be, physically and emotionally — something she understood only abstractly previously as a geriatrician.

And she might not have been struck by what she called the deepest lesson of this pandemic: that caregiving is a manifestation of love, and that love means being present with someone even when suffering seems

overwhelming.

All these experiences have been "a gift, in a way: They've truly changed me," said Elon, 66, a part-time associate professor at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and an adjunct associate professor at the University of Maryland School of Medicine.

Uniquely rich perspective

Elon's uniquely rich perspective on the pandemic is informed by her multiple roles: family caregiver, geriatrician and policy expert specializing in long-term care.

"I don't think we, as a nation, are going to make needed improvements (in long-term care) until we take responsibility for our aging mothers and fathers — and do so with love and respect," she said.

Elon has been acutely aware of prejudice against older adults — and determined to overcome it — since she first expressed interest in geriatrics in the late 1970s.

"Why in the world would you want to do that?" she recalled being asked by a

department chair at Baylor College of Medicine, where she was a medical student. "What can you possibly do for those (old) people?"

Elon ignored the scorn and became the first geriatrics fellow at Baylor, in Houston, in 1984. She cherished the elderly aunts and uncles she had visited every year during her childhood and was eager to focus on this new specialty, which was just being established in the U.S.

"She's an extraordinary advocate for elders and families," said Dr. Kris Kuhn, a retired geriatrician and longtime friend.

In 2007, Elon was named geriatrician of the year by the American Geriatrics Society.

Unexpected turn

Her life took an unexpected turn in 2013 when she started noticing personality changes and judgment lapses in her husband, Dr. William Henry Adler III, former chief of clinical immunology research at the National Institute on Aging, part of the federal National Institutes of Health. Proud and stubborn, he re-

CAREGIVING » PAGE 8



COURTESY OF DR. KRIS KUHN

Dr. Rebecca Elon's life took an unexpected turn in 2013 when she noticed personality changes and judgment lapses in her husband, Dr. William Henry Adler III. He was eventually diagnosed with frontotemporal dementia with motor neuron disease and died in February.



COURTESY OF DR. REBECCA ELON

Dr. Rebecca Elon and her mother, Betty Davis, mask up during the pandemic.

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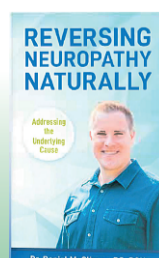


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"At night, I couldn't sleep well because my feet were shocking me. They aren't doing it now and I can sleep all the way through." - Cheryl G.



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Caregiving

FROM PAGE 7

fused to seek medical attention for several years.

Eventually, however, Adler's decline accelerated and in 2017 a neurologist diagnosed frontotemporal dementia with motor neuron disease, an immobilizing condition. Two years later, Adler could barely swallow or speak and had lost the ability to climb down the stairs in their Severna Park, Md., house.

"He became a prisoner in our upstairs bedroom," Elon said.

By then, Elon had cut back on work significantly and hired a home health aide to come in several days a week.

In January 2020, Elon enrolled Adler in hospice and began arranging to move him to a nearby assisted living center. Then, the pandemic hit. Hospice staffers stopped coming. The home health aide quit. The assisted living center went on lockdown. Not visiting Adler wasn't imaginable, so Elon kept him at home, remaining responsible for his care.

"I lost 20 pounds in four months," she told me. "It was incredibly demanding work, caring for him."

Another crisis brewing

Meanwhile, another crisis was brewing. In Kankakee, Ill., Elon's sister, Melissa Davis, was dying of esophageal cancer and no longer able to care for their mother, Betty Davis, 96. The two had lived together for more than a decade, and Davis, who has dementia, required significant assistance.

Elon sprang into action. She and two other sisters moved their mother to an assisted living facility in Kankakee while Elon decided to relocate a few hours away, at a continuing care retirement community in Milwaukee, where she'd spent her childhood.

"It was time to leave the East Coast behind and be closer to family," she said.

By the end of May, Elon

and her husband were settled in a two-bedroom apartment in Milwaukee with a balcony looking out over Lake Michigan. The facility has a restaurant downstairs that delivered meals, a concierge service, a helpful hospice agency in the area and other amenities that relieved Elon's isolation.

"I finally had help," she said. "It was like night and day."

Previously bedbound, Adler would transfer to a chair with the help of a lift (one couldn't be installed in their Maryland home) and look contentedly out the window at paragliders and boats sailing by.

"In medicine, we often look at people who are profoundly impaired and ask, 'What kind of quality of life is that?'" Elon said. "But even though Bill was so profoundly impaired, he still had a strong will to live and retained the capacity for joy and interaction."

If she hadn't been by his side day and night, Elon said, she might not have appreciated this.

Meanwhile, her mother moved to an assisted living center outside Milwaukee to be nearer to Elon and other family members. But things didn't go well. The facility was on lockdown most of the time and staff members weren't especially attentive.

Concerned about her mother's well-being, Elon took her out of the facility and brought her to her apartment in late December.

For two months, she tended to her husband's and mother's needs. In mid-February, Adler, then 81, took a sharp turn for the worse. Unable to speak, his face set in a grimace, he pounded the bed with his hands, breathing heavily.

With hospice workers' help, Elon began administering morphine to ease his pain and agitation.

"I thought, 'Oh, my God, is this what we ask families to deal with?'" she said.

Though she had been a hospice medical director, "that didn't prepare me for the emotional exhaus-

tion and the ambivalence of giving morphine to my husband."

Mother distraught

Elon's mother was distraught when Adler died 10 days later, asking repeatedly what had happened to him and weeping when she was told. At some point, Elon realized her mother was also grieving all the losses she had endured over the past year: the loss of her home and friends in Kankakee; the loss of Melissa, who'd died in May; and the loss of her independence.

That, too, was a revelation made possible by being with her every day.

"The dogma with people with dementia is you just stop talking about death because they can't process it," Elon said. "But I think that if you repeat what's happened over and over and you put it in context and you give them time, they can grieve and start to recover."

"Mom is doing so much better with Rebecca," said Deborah Bliss, 69, Elon's older sister, who lives in Plano, Texas, and who believes there are benefits for her sister as well. "I think having (Mom) there after Bill died, having someone else to care for, has been a good distraction."

And so, for Elon, as for so many families across the country, a new chapter has begun, born out of harsh necessities. The days pass relatively calmly, as Elon works and she and her mother spend time together.

"Mom will look out at the lake and say, 'Oh, my goodness, these colors are so beautiful,'" Elon said. "When I cook, she'll tell me, 'It's so nice to have a meal with you.'"

"When she goes to bed at night, she'll say, 'Oh, this bed feels so wonderful.' She's happy on a moment-to-moment basis. And I'm very thankful she's with me."

Kaiser Health News (KHN) is a national health policy news service. It is an editorially independent program of the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation which is not affiliated with Kaiser Permanente.



COURTESY OF DR. REBECCA ELON

Dr. Rebecca Elon's sister Melissa Davis, right, was the primary caretaker for their mother, Betty Davis, for the past 10 years. But new living arrangements had to be made for their mother when Melissa Davis died of esophageal cancer in May 2020.



COURTESY OF DR. REBECCA ELON

Betty Davis plays with Peanut at Dr. Rebecca Elon's apartment in Milwaukee over the Christmas 2020 holidays.



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VOLUNTEERING



COURTESY OF RSVP

Staff member Craig Soloff welcomes volunteers.

DRIVE-THROUGH EVENTS HONOR RSVP VOLUNTEERS

RSVP

RSVP, the nonprofit volunteer community service organization, recently borrowed a page from its own playbook and staged two drive-through appreciation events for its volunteers.

At the height of the COVID quarantine, RSVP volunteers staffed three drive-through food distributions organized by the Montco Anti-Hunger Network. People needing assistance drove past a set of food stations where volunteers

handed out various food items and vital supplies.

RSVP then adopted the drive-through format for the two volunteer events, which were held at Upland Park in Brookhaven and Montgomery County Community College in Blue Bell. There, staff and board members handed out goodie bags, collected raffle tickets and gave out water, chocolate-covered pretzels donated by Asher's, and small items such as letter-openers to some 80 volunteers driving through in their cars. The final station was a Jack and Jill Ice Cream truck.

A surprise from Renewal

"We usually have an annual



COURTESY OF RSVP

RSVP staff and board members greet volunteers attending the event at Montgomery County Community College.

volunteer appreciation luncheon," said Michele Moll, RSVP's executive director. "But this year we needed to keep things safe and had to think outside the box."

To help stage the event, Moll reached out to Renewal by Andersen, which had recently designated RSVP as its Window of Giving community partner.

"They were amazing," Moll said. "We didn't expect such ex-

traordinary help."

Not only did Renewal pay for most of the refreshments and handouts, but they also provided volunteers to help staff the event, hired the ice cream truck and paid for the raffle prizes — a variety of \$50 gift cards.

"They even had co-branded Andersen-RSVP shirts made for their staff," Moll said.

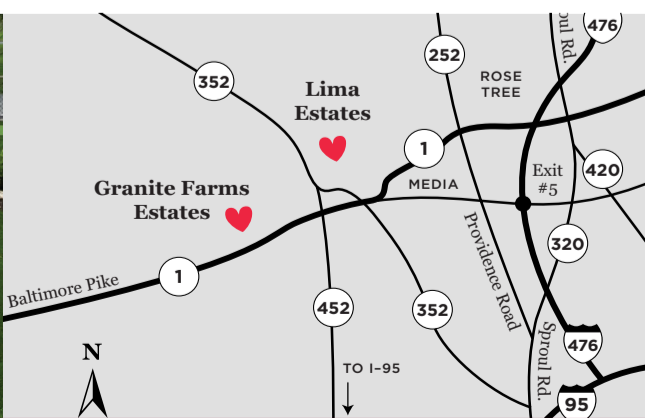
"RSVP does great work in the

community, and we want to recognize them with our partnership," said Kristin Gardner, Renewal by Andersen's general manager for Greater Philadelphia. "In the past we've wrapped books for their Head Start program, some of our people have gone to the Head Start program and read from the books, and we've sponsored their golf tournament.

RSVP » PAGE 2

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Living life and looking ahead

PROMOTING SENIOR WELLNESS

Virtual reality technology making an impact on seniors

By Samantha Gordon
Communications and outreach manager at The Hickman

As technology advances and becomes more popular for entertainment purposes, there are also educational aspects that can come with innovative technology such as virtual reality.

Virtual reality is a three-dimensional simulation generated through a computer. It allows us to physically interact in the simulation with the help of various equipment, such as a headset or gloves.

Yet, virtual reality has become more popular in the senior living industry, especially among various retirement facilities. Check out how virtual reality is making an impact on seniors today.

Virtual reality has proven to provide successful social and physical benefits to those 65 and older. With this technology comes different games and programs to do. The social aspect has allowed older adults to interact and immerse themselves in an environment to explore places with friends and family. Even after combating a pandemic, virtual reality has brought families closer together than ever before.

Physical movement is essential as we age, and differ-

Virtual reality has proven to provide successful social and physical benefits to those 65 and older. With this technology comes different games and programs to do. The social aspect has allowed older adults to interact and immerse themselves in an environment to explore places with friends and family.

ent virtual reality programs encourage older adults to play fun and safe games that allow us to move our legs, arms, feet and hands.

When we immerse into a supporting environment, we can exercise not only our body but our mind too. By traveling through time or across the world, virtual reality brings the world to you. It can boost our mood and reduce overall stress too.

Other research is showing that virtual reality can even ease the nerves when it comes to touring other retirement facilities. We all understand the stress that comes with looking for the best place for mom and dad, but they might be nervous about the change, too.

Some virtual reality programs are designed for mom and dad to tour a facility in the comfort of their own home before possibly seeing it in per-

son. Or if you are interested in checking out a retirement facility states away from you, this option can make it so much easier.

Virtual reality has started to change the way older adults can see the world around us. It can ease anxiety and stress and creates a safe space for relaxation and security.

Since we can use virtual reality in the comfort of our own home, it doesn't require traveling or going out of the house. You can check out virtual reality for yourself or your parent and see the incredible benefits that come with it.

Promoting Senior Wellness is provided by The Hickman, a Quaker-affiliated licensed personal care home in West Chester. Samantha Gordon can be reached at sgordon@thehickman.org or www.thehickman.org.



COURTESY OF THE HICKMAN

Virtual reality has proven to provide successful social and physical benefits to those 65 and older.

RSVP

FROM PAGE 1

"This year we wanted to get more involved. RSVP impacts the community we work and live in and gives our employees an opportunity to do some volunteering. We'll help in an ongoing way."

Volunteer reactions

Volunteer response to the drive-through seemed

positive.

"It was good," said Marguerite Hayes, a volunteer tutor and mentor for RSVP from Collegeville. "I had two visiting nieces and brought them with me. They gave us each little bags with goodies. I talked to a board member, Ray Heath, who's involved with RSVP's VEC program, which I'm interested in."

VEC, the Volunteer Executive Consultants, provides free managerial as-

sistance to nonprofits throughout the region and beyond.

Victor Florio of Aston helped elementary students improve their reading skills before the pandemic. Unlike some volunteers, he did not switch to virtual tutoring during the pandemic.

"I don't have the equipment to do it," he said. "Sitting at home all this school year sort of drove me up a wall."

He said the drive-

through event "was nice. It was well planned. RSVP really lets you know they appreciate all we do."

Although many RSVP volunteers are retired, anyone 18 and older can participate. Julian Mathis, a financial analyst from Sellersville, learned of the organization from a colleague. He mentors a third grader virtually because of the quarantine.

At the appreciation drive-through, "I got to meet the staff person I've been talking to on Zoom. It was very nice, and the ice cream truck at the end was fun."

Sandy Kuritzky of Blue Bell walked to the Montgomery Community College event.

"I thought it was very nice," she said. "If ever we have learned to make lemonade out of lemons, it's been during the past year and a half. We've all stretched our resilience muscles."

Through RSVP's Adult Literacy Program, Kuritzky coaches adults seeking their general education degree.

"Switching to Zoom sessions was helpful to students with children," she said. "Just imagine having to homeschool your kids during the pan-

demic while you're working on your high school equivalency. It's been horrible for everyone."

Change of direction in Delco

Sweltering heat reduced the expected volunteer turnout at the Upland Park appreciation drive-through.

"You could hardly breathe!" Moll said. "So we notified the manager of the SCS Schoolhouse Senior Center, where RSVP provides many of the volunteers. We dropped of our extra goodie bags and ice creams there."

Volunteers who did attend the events "seemed to react well to being appreciated for what they had done in 2020," said RSVP board member Wesley Moy, a retired civil servant who photographed the events.

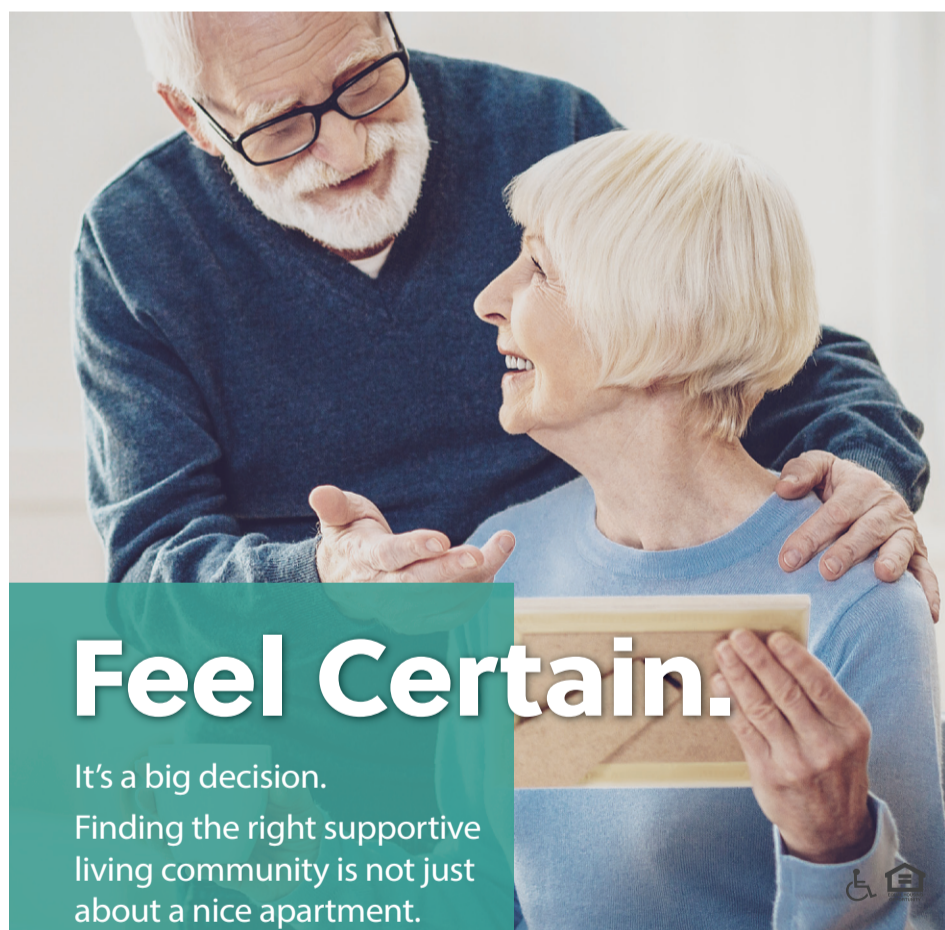
Not surprisingly, "We got comments about the volunteers liking the appreciation luncheon (in prior years) better, because they got to interact with other volunteers. And that's something we're thinking about — how we can create additional opportunities for volunteers to interact."

"It was great to meet

volunteers face-to-face," Moll said. "It was a way to connect with them and let them know we're still here for them. A lot of them really miss their kids and clients and can't wait to get back in person. That was sad. They get so much out of it. Some volunteers offered to help in new areas and got to meet our coordinators whom they hadn't met in person."

Moll emphasized how much she appreciates the "truly incredible" way volunteers modified RSVP's programs to provide virtual services for children, families, adults, seniors and veterans when safety protocols required it. She also lauded "many new volunteers who joined RSVP to meet emerging needs." They staffed food distribution events and cupboards and delivered groceries and warm meals. "They are truly heroes," she said.

Nonprofit RSVP connects volunteers to dozens of community service opportunities. Its programs improve the lives of vulnerable populations in the community by focusing on education and wellness. For more information, visit rsvpmc.org, email volunteer123@rsvpmc.org or call 610-834-1040, ext. 123.



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COURTESY OF RSVP

Staff member Anabella Tracy hands out goodie bags donated by Renewal by Andersen to volunteers at the Upland Park location.

BOOKS

NEW CHILDREN'S BOOK OFFERS REASSURING WORDS AFTER TURBULENT YEAR

Rydal Park

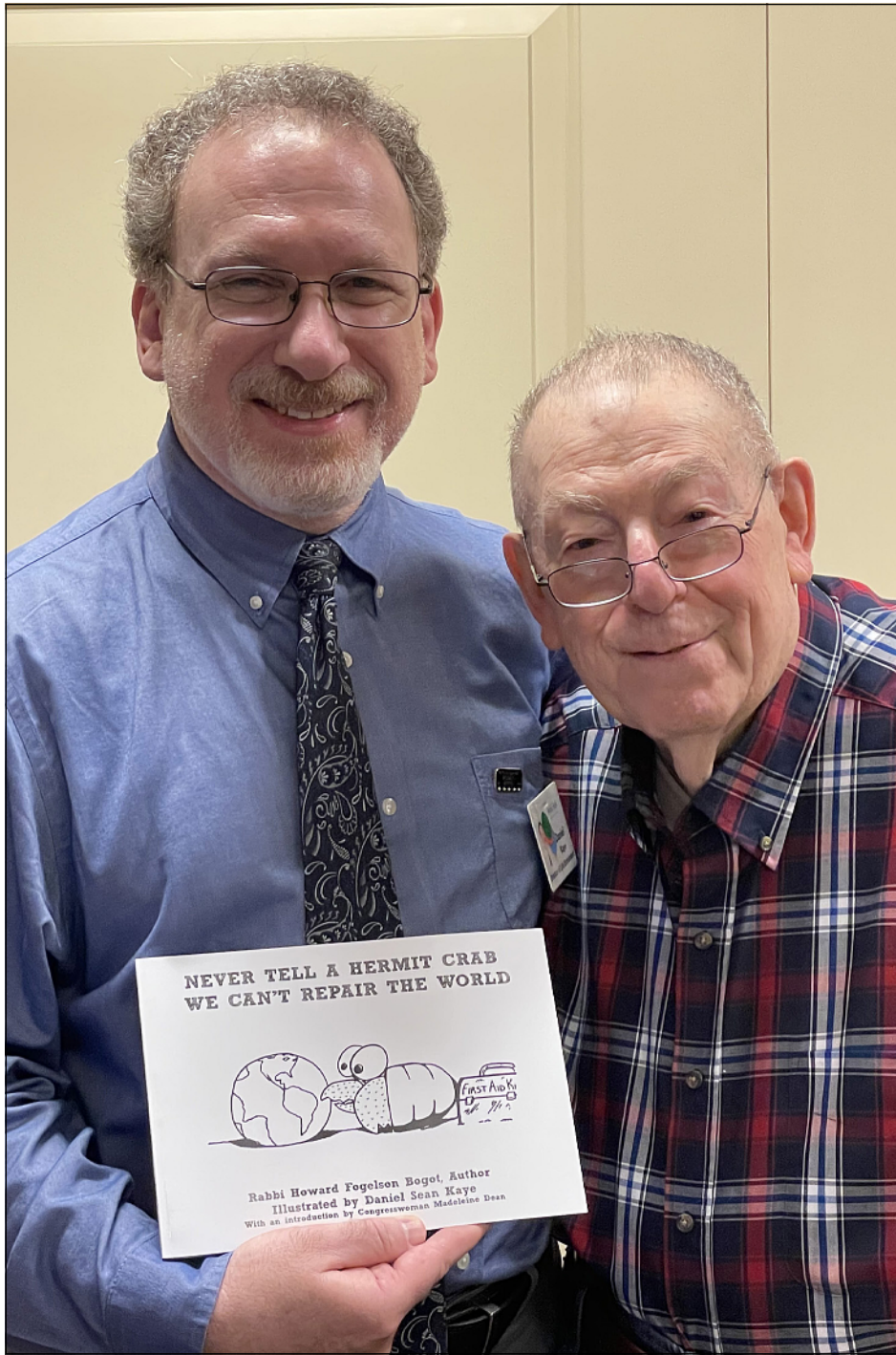
In the new book "Never Tell a Hermit Crab We Can't Repair the World," written by Rydal Park retirement community resident and local author Rabbi Howard Fogelson Bogot, 83, and illustrated by local cartoonist and Rydal Park Director of Community Engagement Daniel Sean Kaye, Milo, a wise hermit crab, reminds readers of all ages that each of us has a role in repairing the world.

From a single smile, handshake or hug, each act of kindness, big or small, helps to make our world a better and more beautiful place. The book is part of Kaye's popular "Hermit Crab" book series, which includes "Never Underestimate a Hermit Crab" and "Never Take a Hermit Crab For Granted."

"This book is intended to offer a message of hope and reassurance for children and children at heart," Kaye said. "Now more than ever, we all need to hear positive messages about how to achieve human goodness and repair our world. Milo encourages readers to come along with him as he shows us the way — the power, the fun and the joy of restoring the world together."

Bogot is a lecturer in Jewish Studies at Abington College of Penn State University. He has written and co-authored books and curriculum guides to enhance spirituality, while serving as the director of religious education for the Union for Reform Judaism.

Kaye is an award-winning editor and writer, and an Abington School Board director. He is also Director of Life Enrichment at Rydal Park, a HumanGood life plan community. The book also includes a heartfelt intro-



Author Rabbi Howard Fogelson Bogot, 83, right, a resident of the Rydal Park retirement community, and illustrator Daniel Sean Kaye, Rydal Park director of community engagement, have collaborated on a new children's book, "Never Tell a Hermit Crab We Can't Repair the World."

duction from Congresswoman Madeline Dean of Pennsylvania's 4th Congressional District.

All proceeds will be donated to the Mary K. Bogot (Bogot's late wife) Memorial Fund to help music

students who require financial assistance at Penn State Abington, and the Rydal Park Friendship Fund that helps residents who face financial hardship.

Copies of the book can be purchased online at

www.danielkaye.net, as well as at two local locations in Glenside: Carminali Creamery and Bettie Jack Studio & Gallery. For more information, contact Daniel Kaye through his website.

ASK RUSTY

Widow has questions about her survivor benefits

By Russell Gloor

DEAR RUSTY » My husband and I were only married 5 years before



Russell Gloor

he passed away from cancer. I am 61 and was told by SS that I don't qualify to receive his survivor benefits because we weren't married long enough, and because I made more money than him when he was alive. I still work full-time and plan to continue until my full retirement age. Am I able to collect any of his benefits? Why can his daughter collect his benefits, but I cannot?

— Frustrated Widow

DEAR FRUSTRATED » You were given partially incorrect information by Social Security because you were married long enough to collect a survivor benefit, but there are also other rules which might affect your eligibility:

- You cannot have remarried before age 60 and be currently married.
- You cannot collect full survivor benefits if you exceed Social Security's annual "earnings limit." That you made more money than your husband (and are presumably entitled to a higher personal SS benefit) isn't material, but your earnings from work could be.

If you didn't remarry before age 60 and remain married, and if you don't earn too much money, you are eligible to collect a survivor benefit as your husband's widow. You can even claim your survivor benefit (only) while allowing your personal SS benefit to grow (if desired, up to age 70 when it reaches maximum). So, you may be eligible to collect a survivor benefit from your husband now, but if you're working full-time, you may make too much money to be able to collect it at this time.

Social Security has an "earnings test" which applies to those collecting early benefits and which limits how much you can earn before they take benefits away. For 2021, the annual earnings limit is \$18,960 and if you earn more than that they will take away benefits equal to \$1 for every \$2 you are over the limit. That could mean you'll owe them

more than you're entitled to in benefits, which would mean no benefits would be paid. Here's an example: Say you make \$60,000 per year working full-time. If you collect the survivor benefit and because you haven't yet reached your full retirement age (FRA), you'll be subject to the earnings limit of \$18,960. At this earnings level you would exceed the limit by about \$41,000. Half of that amount would be about \$20,500, and SS would require you to repay them that amount from your SS benefits. Depending upon your survivor benefit amount, that could disqualify you from receiving monthly benefits.

As you can see from this example, if you work full-time but do not significantly exceed the annual earnings limit, you may be able to collect at least some of your survivor benefits, but I cannot answer that without knowing your annual earnings and approximately what your survivor benefit would be. For clarity, the earnings test no longer applies once you reach your full retirement age.

Regarding your husband's daughter collecting a survivor benefit from him: A surviving minor child of the deceased can collect a survivor benefit until they are 18 (or 19 if still in high school). An adult disabled child who was disabled before age 22 is also eligible to collect a survivor benefit from a deceased parent.

So, let's recap: You were married to your husband long enough to be eligible for a survivor benefit, but you may have significant earnings which disqualify you from receiving those benefits right now. There is no longer an "earnings test" once you reach your FRA (66 years and 10 months), so at your FRA you could collect your full survivor benefit. And you could collect your survivor benefit only first and allow your own personal SS benefit to grow until you are 70 when it would be more than your survivor benefit. At that time, you would switch to your own benefit, which would be about 25% more than your FRA benefit amount.

Russell Gloor is a certified Social Security adviser by the Association of Mature American Citizens: <https://amac.us/social-security-advisor>.

SENIOR LIVING

Waverly Heights reflects on post-pandemic changes for seniors

Waverly Heights

In a post-pandemic world, Waverly Heights Life Plan Community in Lower Merion Township, Montgomery County, is embracing some of the changes brought on by COVID-19 restrictions to better serve its 250 residents in the midst of its safe reopening.

Over the last 18 months, Waverly has utilized an in-house television system to provide video updates from leadership, share pre-recorded health and fitness classes and livestreamed musical performances and educational lectures. The community will continue to share content through this platform both to its overall program offerings and to increase accessibility of programming for residents with limited mobility.

Another expansion of services made available include more frequent and in-depth technology training classes. Over the course of the stay-at-home orders, seniors found themselves relying heavily on smartphones and tablets to stay connected with loved ones. Waverly Heights had previously hosted iPad and iPhone training classes and will grow that offering over the coming months.

"We had been addressing the desire for increased technology and technology education for our residents before the pandemic and this time period has amplified the areas of highest need,"



Waverly Heights will continue to offer iPad and iPhone training classes to its residents.

said Thomas Garvin, Waverly Heights president and CEO. "While we are thrilled to be back to hosting in-person programming and seeing each other, we have to continue adapting and recognize that residents have different preferences on how they receive information. Technology will continue to be a cornerstone of growth at Waverly Heights."

Throughout the pandemic, the staff at Waverly Heights supported residents through an extended period of telehealth usage. This included providing technology education and assistance as

well as facilitating appointments as needed.

Some residents continue to opt for telehealth when available, and Waverly will be evaluating an in-house telehealth platform in the future.

Waverly is also changing how they introduce new residents to the community. Previously they would be invited to a cocktail party for networking. During the pandemic they were filmed doing a recorded interview with Garvin, and that was played over the in-house television network.

Moving forward, a com-

bination of those two approaches will be used so that current residents can meet new residents in a way that is accessible to them.

To learn more about Waverly Heights, visit www.waverlyheightsltd.org.

About Waverly Heights: Waverly Heights is a not-for-profit Continuing Care Life Plan Community located in the heart of Philadelphia's Main Line. Beyond the beautiful gardens and lawns, Waverly Heights offers unparalleled service in an atmosphere of classic style and elegance.

HERITAGE OF GREEN HILLS



COURTESY OF THE HERITAGE OF GREEN HILLS

On the recent International Yoga Day, Heritage of Green Hills Fitness Instructor Jane Marie Clipman, left, led a group of residents in a special celebratory session of chair yoga. Among the participants from the healthy lifeplan community in Cumru Township was Marie Shibley.

AGRICULTURE

'BLAZED THE TRAIL'

Ex-Berks extension agent first woman in national hall of fame



Mena Hautau checks on a soybean seed experiment on a Berks County farm in 2016.

READING EAGLE

By Lisa Scheid

lscheid@readingeagle.com
@LisaScheid on Twitter

Mena Hautau, who spent almost 23 years helping Berks farmers, has become the first woman to receive the highest national award for an extension agent: induction into its hall of fame.

The award was announced virtually this week. She will receive a plaque and her photo will be added to an online gallery of winners.

J. Craig Williams, president of the National Association of County Agriculture Agents, said he has had the honor to work with Hautau for many years and said she is a true hall of fame winner and an example of the high quality county agents from the North East Region.

Emelie Swackhamer, a Penn State Extension educator based in Montgomery County, nominated Hautau for the honor on behalf of Pennsylvania Association of County Agriculture Agents. Swackhamer is association president.

"The face of agriculture is changing," said Swackhamer, noting that the number of women working in agriculture has grown. "Mena blazed the trail for a lot of us."

In her 35-plus years of service, Hautau blazed the trail for agents who followed in Iowa and Pennsylvania, Swackhamer said.

"When I was a young educator in Pennsylvania in the 1990s, Mena encouraged me to rely on my knowledge and to have confidence when there was much less diversity in our co-workers and clients," Swackhamer wrote in her nomination letter. "She exemplified the calm effectiveness of competency without making much of the shifting demographics of our profession. She continued to act as an unofficial mentor to many new educators in Pennsylvania and her legacy lives on in their

work."

Hautau, 65, said she was honored just to be nominated for the hall of fame.

"There were probably other agents that could have been nominated ahead of me," Hautau said in a phone interview.

The NACAA Hall of Fame Award was established in 2006 to recognize NACAA members (active or life) for demonstrated commitment, dedication and effective leadership in job performance as an outstanding educator; association involvement at the state and national level; and outstanding humanitarian service. The award is presented annually to one person from each of the four NACAA regions.

Hautau built her reputation by building relationships and adapting to needs of the farming community.

"Mena is universally respected for her breadth and depth of knowledge in the field and has won many awards for her good efforts," said state Sen. Judy Schwank, who worked at the Berks extension before entering politics and hired Hautau.

Schwank wrote a letter supporting Hautau's nomination.

"It was not uncommon to see her trudging through a rain-soaked pasture or searching for bugs in soybean fields," Schwank added. "More so, she mentored other agents and helped others build relationships with farmers. She has helped ensure that agriculture in Berks County prospers today."

When Hautau was hired as an agronomy agent, there was no extension staff dedicated to working with the large mushroom and tree fruit industry in Berks County. Hautau stepped up to serve these industries for years.

"Mena always approached new challenges in a direct

and practical way, and in doing so she earned the respect of the farming community," Swackhamer wrote.

When many farms were beginning to explore organics as a potentially profitable option, Hautau pursued rigorous training about organic production and USDA certification to increase her skills.

Gregory Stricker and his father, Forrest Stricker, wrote about Hautau's help as their dairy farm, Spring Creek Farms in Heidelberg Township, transitioned from conventional to organic grazing.

Hautau teamed with USDA Agriculture Research Service to conduct a study of the effects of grazing pasture so they knew what was best for lactating cows. Then, she helped others learn the results.

"Farmers can't take such large risks and changes without help from people who can spend time researching these big dilemmas," the Strickers wrote in a letter supporting Hautau's nomination.

The Strickers also wrote about how Hautau secured funding and organized farmers to come together over a lunch to discuss successful organic and crop farming. The pasture walk in collaboration with PASA Sustainable Agriculture attracted 50 participants. Hautau established study circles that brought peer learning to organic farmers.

"This sounds like such a simple concept, but it sticks out as one of the most beneficial series of meetings we have attended," the Strickers wrote. "There is no better teacher than other farmers that have successfully figured out solutions to those difficult problems. Mena was wise to recognize that farmers could benefit from this. Farmers lack time and money to organize a meeting, and Mena stepped in to fill the need."



COURTESY OF MENA HAUTAU

Mena Hautau, a former Berks County Agriculture Extension educator, is the first woman named to the National Association of County Agriculture Agents Hall of Fame.

Berks is never far

Though Hautau moved to the Midwest in 2016, Berks County has been as close to her as a needle and thread.

Hautau said among the many things she's done since moving, she's been quilting.

When in Berks, she took a class on how to create wall hanging quilts at Wooden Bridge Dry Goods in Maxatawny Township. She's gone on to sew several. Most recently she made what she called her pandemic quilt.

"I learned to sew when I was in 4-H where I was raised in northern New Jersey," Hautau said. "Too bad I'm still not in Berks County because it's such a rich area for quilting."

Hautau is living in Stillwater, Minn., with her spouse who has retired.

Hautau said when she started in the field just a generation of women were breaking barriers, earning college degrees in not only in agriculture but in science.

Women were in the minority in agriculture extension service. By the time she left Pennsylvania, she said more than half of the field crop educators were women.

"That's progress in gender equality," Hautau said. "Men and women are both suited for extension education.

"My observation is it doesn't matter if you are a man or woman. Typically you have respect if you have gray hair. It's especially true in agriculture. It's really related to your knowledge. Being open to what they say, watching what they are doing and listening has nothing to do with gender."

Hautau said her mentoring came from men of the World War II generation who wanted to see young people continue in the field.

Hautau said the working women in her family were role models: her mother was a nurse, and she had an aunt who was a head librarian.

Growing up in a horticulture family business prepared her to understand and work with farming families. Hautau said she had an uncle who was gruff and difficult to work with.

"But I knew inside he was a softy," she said. "You have to listen to what's underneath."

Hautau said she could relate to farmers.

"Sometimes you get any return," she said.

But farmers are also attracted to the freedom and independence of agriculture.

"In Berks County

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

HIGHLIGHTS OF MENA HAUTAU'S CAREER:

1968-72: 4-H Member, Sussex County, New Jersey

1973-74: Rotary International Exchange Student, Sweden

1978: 4-H International Youth Exchange Student (IFYE), Hungary. Life Member

1978: Bachelor of Science, Delaware Valley University, Doylestown, major in animal husbandry

1980: Hired as county extension director, Iowa State University, Taylor County

1984: Hired as extension research assistant, Department of Agronomy, Iowa State University, Ames

1987: Master of Science, Department of Agronomy, major in crop production and physiology, Iowa State University, Ames

1987: Hired as extension agriculturist, Iowa State University Extension Service, Scott County

1992: Promoted to extension field specialist - commercial horticulture, Iowa State University Extension Service

1992: Iowa Agricultural Extension Association (IAEA) president

1994: Hired as extension educator - agronomy and agriculture, Penn State Cooperative Extension

2001: Promoted to senior extension educator - agronomy and agriculture, Penn State Cooperative Extension

1994: National member - Pennsylvania Association of County Agricultural Agents

1999-2003: Pennsylvania Association of County Agricultural Agents Board

2011: NACAA Distinguished Service Award

2011: Communication Award, national finalist, website, NACAA

2014: Communication Award, national finalist, program promotional piece, NACAA

SERVICE TO COMMUNITY

1984-2016: Member, American Society of Agronomy

1999-2008: Former Board Member and Life Member, Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA)

2001-05: Former board of directors member, First Unitarian Universalist Church of Berks County; president, 2002-05

2017-present: Grant Review Committees for Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program

there is a lot of tradition," she said. "That's a lot to live up to. The benefit is you have a lot of indigenous knowledge."

That generational knowledge is also why farming in southeastern Pennsylvania remains successful. Another reason is the proximity to urban markets that enables farmers to pivot to niche crops or agritourism.

Hautau said Berks has a great soil and climate for growing many crops.

"It's one of the richest places to grow anything," Hautau said. "We used to joke: If cows eat and people eat it, I cover it."

Hautau said she's spent winters housesitting on Block Island, R.I. She said it is a place that she connects to emotionally. The community is different in the winter when tourists are gone.

It turns out for Hautau retirement isn't all about quilting or other pursuits.

"What is ironic is that in my group of quilters they found out my background," she said. "And they asked me to judge plant science projects for 4H and crop, garden and vet exhibits. I think it's funny because at one point I had to line up the judges."