

A Newsletter that Tugs at Your *Heartstrings*

People who work the night shift at a retirement community often form a special bond.

The hustle and bustle of an active community is still, yet the needs of those who require care and are nearing life's end continue. Nurses and other night staff have few visitors, phone calls or other distractions to lighten the load or bring a laugh. They lean on each other and when times are tough, they hold each other up.

That's what happened two years ago at a nightly shift meeting at Kendal at Oberlin.



Staff members who work on the quarterly newsletter "*Heartstrings*" received an Excellence in Service Award from Leading Age Ohio in September.

"We had experienced numerous losses of our beloved residents, some of whom had been founding residents of Kendal at Oberlin. It was truly heartwarming to share our memories and as one staff person put it, 'This really tugs at your heartstrings.' Thus the name of our newsletter and concept were born," explains Tanya Phillips, night nurse manager.

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Kendal People Recognized Again and Again



In addition to the *Heartstrings* award, LeadingAge Ohio honored six Kendal at Oberlin residents and two staff members at its annual conference in September.

- Don VanDyke, a founding resident of Kendal at Oberlin and an extraordinary volunteer, was given the Excellence in Volunteer Service award. After Don's retirement as an ophthalmologist, he found many organizations needing him, most of all, Kendal at Oberlin. He has 25,000 volunteer hours conservatively tracked by Kendal, though such records are not important to Don. At 91 years of age, he shows no interest in "retiring." His devotion and service to Kendal and the community have made a better place for all generations to age.

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Kendal People...

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- Residents who won creative arts awards include:
Don Parker, 1st place in fiction for "Railroad Man";
Marjorie Porter, 2nd place in non-fiction for "A Country Doctor"; Lal Arora, honorable mention for poem "My India"; Paul Schwaegerle, 3rd place for computer art "Cate's Flowers at Breakfast" and Eleanor Helper, honorable mention for computer art "Fruit Still Life."
- Kim Preston, Kendal at Oberlin Social Services Associate, was awarded a \$1,000 scholarship for college level nursing classes and Ashley Krueck, a staff member of Kendal at Oberlin's Creative Arts Department, was awarded the \$2,500 Clark Law Management Scholarship for gerontology studies.
- In addition, Kendal at Home Executive Director Lynne Giacobbe was named Outstanding Executive.

LeadingAge Ohio is a nonprofit organization that represents approximately 500 long-term care organizations and hospices, as well as those providing ancillary health care and housing services, in more than 150 Ohio towns and cities. The continuum of care reflected by the member organizations serve an estimated 400,000 older Ohioans daily and employ more than 35,000 persons statewide.



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Tanya and other members of the night staff, including aides, housekeepers, dining room and maintenance staff, wrote about their feelings, interviewed a resident whose husband had recently died, shared a prayer, comfort food recipes and locations for grief support meetings. When the four-page issue of *Heartstrings* showed up in staff mailboxes, everyone welcomed it.

Surprised and Comforted

CEO Barbara Thomas says the quarterly newsletter has become "an invaluable unique collection of contributions bringing comfort to readers. The newsletter provides an opportunity for education about the death and dying process and also a chance to learn about and from our night team."

"They continue to publish the newsletter, filling a void and offering comfort in unique ways to cope with the emotions we experience when facing the loss of those we love," Barbara wrote in a letter nominating the *Heartstrings* staff for an Excellence in Service Award from LeadingAge Ohio.

At the recent annual conference in Columbus, Tanya and several other night staff members accepted the award. (See box to read about Kendal's other LeadingAge winners.)

Tanya says the newsletter has had a profound effect on both staff and residents, many who have asked to be added to the mailing list.

"It has given a voice to staff to express and share their personal grief experiences as well as grief experiences regarding the loss of residents. Often caregivers are expected to proceed with daily duties after the death of a resident without much thought given to them about their grief and feelings of loss.

"*Heartstrings* has provided the opportunity to educate regarding end of life care issues and quality of life improvements and provide motivational and emotional support. As a nurse with a hospice background, education and support can provide much comfort to grieving staff and family members.

"We have had involvement from family members and residents diagnosed with progressive diseases such as Parkinson's disease and dementia. These persons detailed their disease from the time of diagnosis, medical, physiological and social therapeutic programs with directed concerns for their own end of life care," she explains.

Dennis Cook: Developing Technology

Keeping abreast of technological advances has been a hallmark of Kendal at Oberlin since its founding in 1993. But the retirement community got a super surge of support three years ago when a couple from Maryland moved in.

Dennis Cook is an electrical engineer with lots of know-how and hands-on experience working with computers, sounds systems and the like. His wife, Judy, a professional folk singer, also knows a thing or two about computers and sound systems.

“Engineering is a disease. If someone gives you a problem you want to solve it,” he says.

His first solution was coming up with a resident database, revising open source software he developed for a couple of folklore organizations.

Residents can search the database to find lots of information: resident, staff and organizational directories;



events calendar; plus the location of trees in Kendal’s John Bartram Arboretum, and details (including photographs) of paintings and other artwork displayed throughout the

What the “Hack” is Happening?

Thanks to a two-day “hackathon” in California, Kendal at Oberlin staff will soon be able to quickly and securely obtain signed approval of necessary forms for residents who have a health care power-of-attorney. The software was developed for free by techy college students who gathered in San Jose in September to help Kendal and 17 other nonprofits solve a technology issue.

Kendal was the only non-California organization invited to attend “Opportunity Hack,” which was sponsored by PayPal, Microsoft and IBM and attracted more than 500 hackers. Kendal learned of the event from a resident’s son, who works in Silicon Valley, and submitted a proposal that was accepted.

Don Mulica, Kendal’s Computer Support Specialist, represented Kendal at the event.

“It was good to see that so many people were willing to help out these organizations,” Don said.



Don Mulica, second from left, represented Kendal at Oberlin at the “hackathon” in San Jose, California.

Solutions

campus. Soon, issues of Eureka!, a literary and creative arts publication, will be online and eventually Kendal's archival materials and photographs.

Given the 90-plus committees at Kendal, the database will always be "a work-in-progress," Dennis says, adding, "I just provide the vehicle, data is up to them."

Dennis' second solution was designing and installing a new sound system for the three dining areas, with the assistance of Judy and Kendal's electrician, Jon Hall. It was a small job for Dennis, given his experience doing sound for such events as the U.S. Library of Congress and Mystic Seaport Sea Music Festival, but a big boost for diners.

The turnkey, adaptive system is easy to operate and automatically adjusts to the speaker's volume. Future projects include improving audio and video in the main auditorium, done — like all other projects — in conjunction with other residents and staff.

"That's one of the things that made us choose Kendal at Oberlin. This is a community that works together to get things done. And boy, do we have talent here and people are willing to share it," he says.

Dennis needs advance planning for hardware projects, as he and Judy spend about one-third of their time traveling to give historically themed performances in the U.S. and UK. Judy sings Anglo-American folk songs, plays a concertina and Dennis is the "roadie," handling the sound, video projection and lighting. The couple also hosts a weekly folk radio show, broadcast at 3pm on Wednesdays on WOBC (91.5 FM) and streamed on WOBC.org.

"I know people who retired before I did and didn't have any outside hobbies and they died — they had nothing to live for. When we moved here the actuarial tables said I have 25 more years to live and I plan to use them," Dennis says.

Thursday Lecture Programs Entertain and Educate

Scanning the titles of the Third Thursday Lecture Series tells a multi-layered history of Kendal at Oberlin, the larger community and the bigger world.

The nighttime series kicked off soon after Kendal opened in October 1993 with "Ethnicity: Source of Strength? Source of Conflict?" and has covered topics ranging from the community's wetlands and Oberlin College's Allen Memorial Art Museum to bicycling in Holland and practicing Buddhism in Thailand.

Some topics are particularly timely — the decline of newspapers and civil liberties in an election — while others focus on slavery, Italian Renaissance and other historical themes.

While topics and titles change with the times, the focus remains the same — to invite speakers of interest to residents and the general public.

A committee, currently chaired by Kendal resident Priscilla Steinberg, is rarely lacking for speaker and topic ideas. Speakers have included college presidents and professors, artists and scientists, civic and cultural leaders, residents and family members.

Having a speaker with a brilliant mind is great, but what's key is the speaker's ability to deliver an engaging lecture, Priscilla says.

The popularity of the program — on average 80-100 people attend — spawned a second lecture series. The First Thursday Health Lecture Series offers educational programs on health, wellness and medical topics by health professionals.

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Meet the Staff **Rey Carrion**

Facilities Director Rey Carrion has been on the move since he arrived at Kendal two years ago. In addition to supervising a staff of 15 people who are responsible for the 100-acre campus and 500,000 square feet of building, Rey oversees multiple capital improvement projects.

Working at a nonprofit retirement community is a big switch for Rey, who spent 21 years as a city employee for Lorain, first as an intern planner and finally as the director of building, housing and planning. Rey wasn't looking for a new job, but one day a job opening on a social media site caught his eye.

What brought you to Kendal?

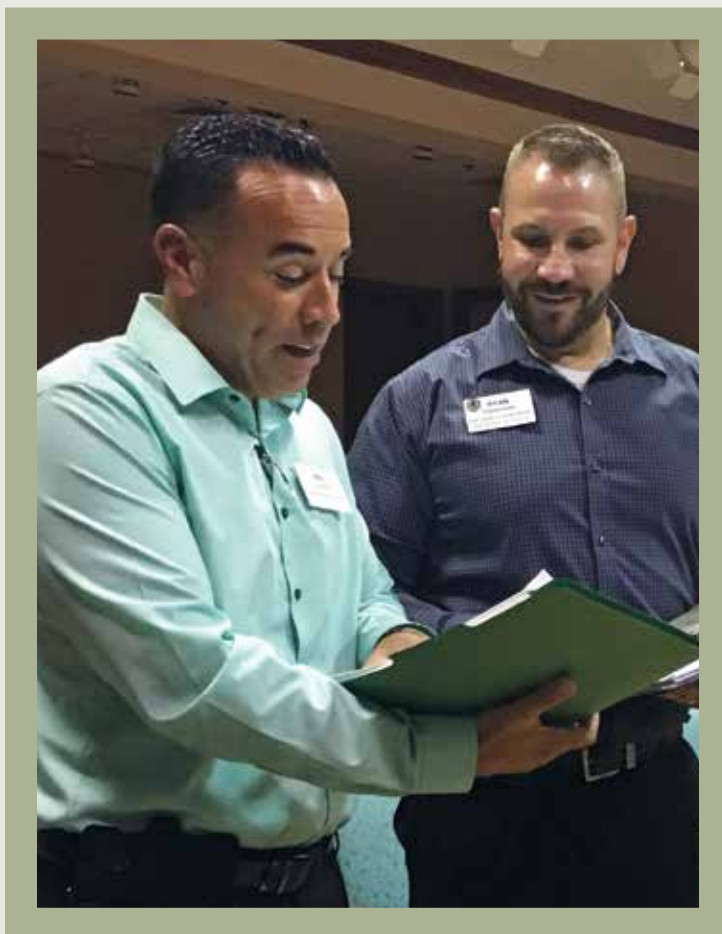
When I read the job description I thought, "This is me!" My first contact was a phone interview with Human Resources Director, Toni Merleno. We talked for an hour and a half, and I could sense her care and compassion and how she values people. The more I talked to her, the more I was being drawn to Kendal, it sounded like a wonderful place to work. When I drove up to the front gate for my interview I was immediately impressed, the "wow" factor, and as I drove around I could see the pride in the community. The way people greeted me was so positive, I knew Kendal had high standards.

What building projects are underway?

We are working on a multi-year plan to renovate all cottages and apartments as they become vacant. We are updating kitchens and bathrooms in all the housing and adding 150 square feet and vaulted ceilings to the cottages. We're going for the "wow" factor. This fall we are breaking ground on the Jameson House, a 12-bed designated area for residents with dementia that is slated for completion in May. It will have an open kitchen and walking loop along with special programming. The Farmers Pond is being expanded and cleaned up, following a plan submitted to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and will include a pier and manmade islands.

Has the transition been difficult for you?

Even though I had no experience working with older adults, I had always stressed during my time at Lorain,



Kendal's Facility Services Director Rey Carrion, left, juggles a busy meeting schedule with Ryan Stalzkowski, Assistant Director of Facility Services, and others.

"What are we doing for our seniors?" My grandparents came from Puerto Rico and were one of the original founders of Sacred Heart Chapel in Lorain. My parents were both doers and taught me you always respect your elders. Our seniors have contributed so much, I just feel we have to do better for them.

About six months after arriving at Kendal, I realized there was a lot of hardship for residents with the ongoing construction. It's noisy and dirty and doesn't end. So I implemented weekly meetings with two resident liaisons who keep me updated on resident concerns and issues. Those meetings have been a big plus. At Kendal I work with older adults who have a high level of involvement. Residents go to as many meetings as I do, they are full of excitement and want to solve problems. Every meeting, every conversation, I learn something. It's incredibly rewarding.



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Topics have ranged from pain management to joint replacement, organ donation and dental health. Last year the committee, which includes a half-dozen retired physicians who live at Kendal, asked residents for suggestions.

"As a direct result, we scheduled the first on-site driver safety education course taught by AAA safety instructor Lori Cook. The response from participants was overwhelmingly positive," wrote chair Bud Spierling in the committee's annual report.

In fact, driver safety was so popular that the Transportation Committee plans to offer continuing programs.

Former chair Ruth Miller said the health series is a great way for residents to learn about specialists in the area. "I have made appointments with at least two people that came," she says.

Both of the series take a few Thursdays off during the summer and holiday months. And while the committees try to keep to a Thursday schedule, they are flexible so as to accommodate the speaker's schedule.