

# DIALOG

*A publication of Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries*

*Winter 2009*

## Mark Pile named Diakon president/CEO

Mark T. Pile will be Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries' next president/CEO.

Currently Diakon's chief operating officer, Pile was unanimously selected by the Diakon and Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries boards of directors in mid-November, following a more-than-year-long national search process. His appointment is effective Jan. 1.

Pile replaces the Rev. Daun E. McKee, Ph.D., president/CEO since Diakon's creation in 2000, who will retire the end of 2009. McKee was president/CEO of The Lutheran Home at Topton and, later, Lutheran Services Northeast—one of the two organizations that created Diakon—for five years before that.

"We are delighted to name Mark Pile as our next president/CEO and look forward to working with Mark and his team to continue the excellent ministry carried out daily by Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries and its staff members," said Susan Schellenberg, chair of the Diakon board. "We believe, following our extensive search, that we have selected the absolute best candidate for this important role."

The selection concluded a national search process conducted by a search committee appointed by the two boards of directors and including members of both boards. The search involved multiple interviews with candidates presented by a national search firm and included committee sessions with leaders in the fields in which Diakon serves to help define the characteristics of the ideal candidate to be Diakon's next president/CEO. Final candidates came from across the country and represented several faith traditions.

"I am appreciative of the confidence the Diakon boards have shown in me, and look forward to the opportunity to serve the agency and all of its constituents in my new role," says Pile. "Diakon is staffed by a tremendous group of employees and supported by dedicated board members, all of whom are committed to ensuring that the organization continues to provide quality services that make a real difference in peoples' lives," he adds.

"Together, we will escort Diakon into the future, addressing the challenges and embracing the opportunities ahead. I look forward to deepening my relationship with our stakeholders and



our many valued donors," he says.

Pile was named executive vice president/chief operating officer when Diakon was created, having held a similar role with Lutheran Services Northeast. He joined LSN as senior vice president in 1997, overseeing program operations. Prior to joining LSN, he served as vice president of Somerset Hospital in western Pennsylvania. Before that, he was executive director of Twin Lakes Center, a Somerset, Pa., non-profit drug and alcohol treatment service.

A Fellow with the American College of Health Care Executives and a member of the Academy of Certified Social Workers, Pile is a 1974 graduate of Lycoming College in Williamsport, Pa., from which he received a bachelor's degree in sociology, cum laude. He earned his Master of Science in Social Work degree from the University of Pittsburgh and also holds a master's degree in health administration from the Medical College of Virginia in Richmond, Va.

OUR MISSION

In response to God's love in Jesus Christ, Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries will demonstrate God's command to love the neighbor through acts of service.

Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries is a leading provider of senior living accommodations and social services, including adoption, counseling, home care, and youth programs in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Delaware. With many hands and one heart, Diakon staff members each year touch the lives of nearly 100,000 children, families, and older adults. Diakon's mission is to respond to God's call to serve the neighbor, and we are proud to continue a nearly-150-year tradition of hospitality and care for people of all faiths.

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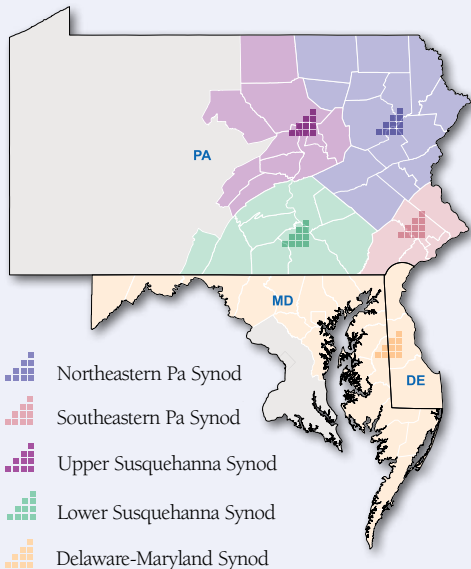
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DIAKON SERVICE TERRITORY



THE PRESIDENT'S DIALOG



The Rev. Dawn E. McKee, Ph.D.

This is my final *Dialog* column as president and chief executive officer of Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries. I write this message following a week of celebrations and a Service of Farewell and Godspeed—a week filled with friends, supporters, and family, a week filled with feelings and emotions that will live with my spouse, Mary Jo, and me forever.

Mary Jo and I spent six weeks the end of this summer visiting our senior living communities and Diakon Family & Community Ministries program sites. We had an opportunity to visit with staff, speak with many residents, and see the many changes that have occurred during the first 10 years of Diakon.

It was a time for celebration of our ministries and a time also to be humbled by all the hard work and dedication we experienced wherever we went.

It is that dedication, hard work, love for our residents and clients, and unselfish service by so many that affected Mary Jo and me the most. All of the statistics and listings of the multitude of programs Diakon provides are interesting, but not nearly as impressive and inspiring as seeing firsthand the outpouring of service we experienced as we visited those places where Diakon lives out its mission.

And we experienced this dedication both where Diakon staff members directly serve people and where Diakon ministry support staff perform the tasks that make it possible for direct-care staff to do their jobs. Dedication and service are everywhere.

Diakon has had to make some very difficult and emotional decisions during the last 10 years. Those decisions affected some of our residents more than others and some of our colleagues in more dramatic ways than others. The decisions were difficult but they were the right decisions for our ministry in the face of financial and other challenges.

As we traveled around Diakon, we saw the fruits of those decisions in enhanced services and facilities and heard of the many more people being served who otherwise might not have received the help they need, were we not to remain financially strong.

Throughout my career, I have been especially blessed to be surrounded by some of the most dedicated, mission-driven, professional people in social ministry. I count among these people the boards of directors I have had the privilege to serve under, my executive management team, my leadership team, and all my colleagues across Diakon.

I thank them for making my years in social ministry so exciting, fulfilling,

## Programs keep residents active, engaged

and complete. I also am grateful that I will be retiring from an organization that is strong both financially and in terms of its personnel and remains firmly committed to its heritage as a ministry of the Lutheran church.

It is time for Mary Jo and me to enter the next stage of our lives, one we find filled with high expectations, exciting plans, and new adventures. It also is time for me to pass the leadership of Diakon on to a respected, trusted, and loved colleague, Mark Pile.

I am excited and grateful that Mark has been chosen to lead Diakon to greater levels of ministry and more successful expressions of service to our clients. Mark has been one of my most trusted, faithful, and dedicated colleagues. I have appreciated his honesty, his passion, and his dedication to Diakon's clients and staff. His unwavering commitment to do what is right in every circumstance will be a hallmark of his time as our new executive. It is time to move on with hope, with support for Mark, and with confidence in this new age for Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries!

I am grateful to be able to retire confident that, with Mark's outstanding leadership, the talents of a dedicated leadership team, and the commitment to service by staff across Diakon, this precious gift of ministry passed on to us by our predecessors is in competent, caring, and faithful hands.

God bless all of you.



The Rev. Daun E. McKee, Ph.D.  
President/CEO



Residents stimulate memories through their art.

■ Residents of The Lutheran Home at Topton, a Diakon Lutheran Senior Living Community in Topton, Pa., are praising two new programs that meet the special needs of older adults.

### Keeping fitness joint-friendly

Ed and Norma Whetstone are getting a pretty good workout. They and others in the Arthritis Foundation exercise class are stretching, flexing, and bending as lively music plays in the background. And it all happens while they are sitting down or standing just in front of their chairs.

The specially designed program uses gentle movements to help those with arthritis increase joint flexibility and range of motion and maintain muscle strength, explains Karen Gottschall, Topton's former director of community life and program instructor. She completed training to lead the class.

"It's a different kind of approach, not as intense as other classes," she says. "We work on balance and endurance as well as range-of-motion. Participants get the exercise benefits without stressing their joints."

The Topton senior living community offers the class twice a week, along with other options for exercise and fitness including strength-training classes, seated yoga, and swimming. The campus also houses a fitness center.

The new arthritis-sensitive class has earned positive reviews.

"I like to move and do something every day," says 83-year-old Ed Whetstone. "This is a good addition."

Luther Crest, a Diakon Lutheran Senior Living Community in Allentown, Pa., also has staff trained in the Arthritis Foundation's exercise principles and offers the class to its residents.



Topton residents work on remaining flexible in new Arthritis Foundation exercise classes.

### Using creativity to stimulate memory

With paper and paints ready, the older adults embark on a journey.

They don't leave the room, but rather travel in their minds, stimulated by colorful images on cloth napkins in front of them. Streaks of bright colors and vivid pictures of apples, flowers, and pumpkins lead them to create their own paintings.

Memories in the Making® is a program of the Alzheimer's Association designed to provide persons with memory-related conditions an outlet for creative expression. The activity can offer a method to give form to a memory or emotion no longer able to be expressed any other way.

Lynda Gobright facilitates the sessions. A retired school counselor and educator in gerontology, she and Topton staff members received training from the Alzheimer's Association.

Using a variety of props to stimulate memories and creativity, Gobright circulates among participants, encouraging their work. Other volunteers talk with residents about their art and what it means, creating a "story" for each picture. Many of the paintings and accompanying stories are displayed around the Topton campus. ■

## Art is the fabric of her life

Woven into just about everything she does is Barbara Nielsen's love for the arts—especially painting with watercolor and weaving fabric.

“Initially, I considered myself a fiber artist, but I have branched out,” she says while sitting in her home at Ohesson, a Diakon Lutheran Senior Living Community in Lewistown, Pa., where she lives with her husband, Bruce, a retired attorney. Adorning the walls are some of her own framed watercolor paintings and collages she has designed.

Her works of art—including woven pieces such as purses, scarves, and coats—have been placed in exhibits and sold in area artisan shops.

“Barbara is a very gifted artist,” says fellow artist Karen Albers Sigler, who is responsible for organizing the Art Along the Juniata art show held at Ohesson each May. “She is a gifted teacher and mentor, too. Her personality is very encouraging.”

Over the years, Nielsen has shared her talents with countless students as she worked as an elementary school art teacher; she retired in 2007. The Lewistown native graduated from Brown University with a degree in art history.



*Barbara Nielsen at her home at Ohesson*

“In the 1960s a lot of women just didn't work, but when my husband went to law school, I began teaching and realized that I loved it.”

Fostering appreciation for art in others, in 2003 she began inspiring adult students by teaching watercolor classes at her home church in Lewistown.

“I get tremendous inspiration from my students. We learn from each other. It is a joint effort, and I try to bring in new things to them.” Each summer, she vacations at the Chautauqua Institution in New York, which offers a plethora of cultural opportunities including watercolor classes.

“I take these classes and get inspired. I bring what I have learned back to my students.”

Recently, she volunteered to share her talents with Ohesson residents by teaching watercolor classes. Senior living and a small group of nursing-center residents gather in the solarium to learn the art of watercolor.

“The class provides an opportunity that some may not otherwise have. Often, people do not paint in their home, but if given the space and time, they will paint,” says Nielsen, who notes that she enjoys the cultural opportunities available at Ohesson.

“We knew we always wanted to be here. Bruce's mom lived here before she passed away three years ago, and she loved it. We feel incredibly lucky and delighted to have had the opportunity to move to this cottage about a year ago.” ■

## Youths give back to their community

Participants of the Flight Program, a Diakon Wilderness Center program that helps young people discover and practice independent living skills, recently gave back to the community by teaming up with Cumberland Valley Habitat for Humanity to help with demolition work on a project in Carlisle, Pa.

Removing the walls, ceilings, and anything else attached to the original frame of the structure

proved to be a perfect project for the young men, who had the job done and the dumpster full in only three hours. They were challenged, and yet rewarded, by being given the opportunity to help others in need.

Through this and other activities (see a related story on page DB-4 of Donor Blessings), these young men grow stronger in their desire to succeed and support one another in facing life's challenges. ■



*A group of young men give back to their community by teaming up with Habitat for Humanity in the demolition of a home. The youths are participants in Diakon's Flight Program.*

# DONOR BLESSINGS

## WINTER 2009

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## Highmark Healthy High 5 presents grant to Diakon program

*More girls being helped with self-esteem issues because of program expansion*

Being a girl is not easy in today's society. With 59% of girls in fifth to 12th grades dissatisfied with their body, and only 29% of high-school girls reporting that they feel "happy the way they are," a program like Girls on the Run is more important than ever.

Girls on the Run targets girls in the key years of late elementary/middle school when self-respect issues can arise. Thanks in part to a grant from Highmark Healthy High 5, an initiative of the Highmark Foundation, Diakon's Girls on the Run program in Lehigh County, Pa., can now reach more girls than ever before.

A \$53,049 grant was awarded to the Diakon-sponsored Girls on the Run of Lehigh County program from the Highmark Foundation as part of its Highmark Healthy High 5 initiative. The grant is intended to support all costs for expansion to new program sites.

Girls on the Run of Lehigh County is one of nine Girls on the Run councils in Pennsylvania, with more than 160 councils throughout the United States and Canada. Diakon also sponsors the program in Lycoming County through Girls on the Run of Central Pennsylvania.

To date, the grant has allowed Diakon to add seven new sites,

serving 172 girls (at the Highmark Healthy High 5 sites only).

Results have been positive. Program evaluations show that Girls on the Run positively affects the self-esteem of the girls who participate, as well as positively influence their body image and overall orientation toward a healthier lifestyle. Evaluations also suggest that program benefits have extended to the girls' family members as well, with parents reporting less family distress as a result of the changes in their daughter, as well as more healthy family attitudes and behaviors.

## *BNY Mellon grant supports new Diakon Wilderness Center day program*

The Diakon Wilderness Center in Boiling Springs, Pa., has received a \$50,000 grant from BNY Mellon to be used toward the start-up costs associated with the new Center Point Day Program. The grant was made possible through the Helen D. Groome Beatty Trust, a BNY Mellon Mid-Atlantic Charitable Trust.

"We were delighted to receive this funding," says Corey Carothers, administrator of the center, which serves at-risk youths from across Pennsylvania. "The new weekday program provides educational, vocational, community-service, and socialization activities for area young people and is designed as an alternative to placement of the youths in residential treatment facilities."

Tim Bilger, director of corporate advancement, says partnerships with funding sources such as BNY Mellon are now more important than ever. "These partnerships are crucial to our efforts to meet the needs of the ever-changing juvenile-justice system through development of programs to help youths within our communities. Without this financial support, we would be hard-pressed to serve their needs in this way."

The Diakon Wilderness Center and its related programs last year served more than 950 youths from across Pennsylvania. Other center programs include residential treatment, weekend activities for youths in community-based programs during the week, a 30-day wilderness challenge course, and a new mentoring program for former center students.

*For more information on the new Center Point Day Program, please see story on Page 5 of Dialog.*





Wade Brown, left, with donors Pastor Joe and Barb Skillman.



A new dolly and a framed portrait of Kathryn Sophia Beasley Hall were among the gifts received by Wade Brown at the Diakon Kathryn's Kloset open house reception.

## Diakon Kathryn's Kloset advisory council hosts open house reception

The advisory council of Diakon Kathryn's Kloset recently hosted an open house reception to introduce the program to the community. The reception included guests of advisory council members as well as partners of Diakon Kathryn's Kloset.

Diakon Kathryn's Kloset collects corporate in-kind product donations, warehouses them, and offers them to other non-profit organizations that, in turn, give them free of charge to people in need within various communities.

During the reception, a presentation was made by Pastor Roy Smith of Each One Reach One of Shrewsbury, Pa. Each One Reach One is one the first organizations to partner with Diakon Kathryn's Kloset. Smith presented a framed portrait of Kathryn Sophia Beasley Hall, for whom Diakon Kathryn's Kloset is named, along with a gift of \$1,000 while challenging guests to join him in this crusade to serve those in need.

Wade Brown, executive director of Diakon Kathryn's Kloset and Hall's son, offered his appreciation to those present for helping his mother's legacy of service come to daily fruition. He also thanked Baltimore Mayor Sheila Dixon for her support through the years as well the leadership of Diakon for believing in him and his dream.

Throughout the evening, guests toured the warehouse facility to see firsthand the impact that Diakon Kathryn's Kloset is making on communities throughout the mid-Atlantic region.

Advisory Council members present included Emried D. Cole, Anita Langford, Erich March, Wanda Watts, and William Haskett.

### Create a Legacy of Giving



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With a gift annuity, you make a gift to our organization and you receive fixed income for life and a charitable income tax deduction.

For more information on creating a charitable gift annuity, please visit our web site at [www.diakon.org](http://www.diakon.org) or call us today at 610-682-1290.

### Three major events raise money for Diakon programs

More than 700 people enjoyed good food, fun, and networking at three Diakon events in 2009. Benefiting a variety of Diakon programs, almost \$310,000 was raised.

Diakon's annual Dining With Diakon-Capital Region was held for the fifth year and raised money for the Diakon Wilderness Center. This opportunity for local professionals to help serve their favorite recipes, prepared by Morrison Senior Dining, while also raising funds for a good cause has resulted in a successful event in the Harrisburg region each year.

That event has been so successful that

it was duplicated this fall as the first annual Dining With Diakon-Eastern Pennsylvania event, held at the Da Vinci Science Center in Allentown. Proceeds from this event benefited Diakon Adoption & Foster Care.

As a stepping stone to a third Dining With Diakon, to be held in Baltimore, Palate & Perception, an event featuring local artists and benefiting Diakon's Maryland programs such as Diakon Kathryn's Kloset and Diakon KidzStuff, was held last spring. More information on all three of these events for 2010 will be shared soon.



Chefs from Morrison Senior Dining serve up signature dishes at Dining With Diakon-Eastern PA.



Guests network with friends and co-workers at Palate & Perception, held in Baltimore.



Daun and Mary Jo McKee, standing, visit with generous donors, from left, Earl and Shirley Mutter, and Helen Melick.



From left, MaryEllen Dickey, senior vice president of advancement, events & government relations, with generous donors Alma and Bill Deibert, and Ardath and Col. Harry Yoder.

## We thank God always for you


Diakon's generous donors are a big part of the success of our organization. These exceptional donors were thanked at several different luncheons this November. The theme of these luncheons was: I thank God always for you (1 Corinthians 1:4).

In 2008, a special group of donors who share their compassion and generosity with those in need became Diakon's first Many Hands One Heart Society.

The Many Hands One Heart Society is a group of committed donors who each make a cumulative contribution of \$500 or more during the calendar year to help sustain Diakon's mission. Various levels of the society, based on the overall, annual gift, have different benefits.

Almost 300 charter members were inducted into the Many Hands One Heart Society in 2008, each member receiving a certificate, a pin, and special recognition in Diakon's annual Donor Report.

Members who contributed at the highest levels of giving were recognized at the first annual Leader's Dinner in June of this year. Daun and Mary Jo McKee presented President's Level donors with an original, hand-crafted, special-edition 2008 tile in recognition of their support of Diakon's mission.

 To find out how you can become a donor or a member of Diakon's Many Hands One Heart Society, please call the Office of Advancement at 1-877-DIAKON-7, option 2, extension 21290.

## Communities celebrate successful campaign

Diakon's annual campaign to raise funds for senior living services had a remarkable 2009. The campaign raised nearly \$50,000 this year—an increase of 52% over 2008's response.

For the past two years, Diakon has held the Diakon Senior Living Services Annual Fund Campaign.

Residents, families, and friends of the various Diakon Lutheran Senior Living Communities, including Buffalo Valley Lutheran Village, Cumberland Crossings, Frey Village, Luther Crest, The Lutheran Home at Topton, and Diakon Lutheran Senior Living – Hagerstown/The Ravenwood & Robinwood Campuses, were asked to make gifts in support of the benevolent care endowment funds at their respective communities.


Residents of Luther Crest in Allentown, Pa., recently celebrated their successful campaign to increase the Benevolent Care Endowment Fund with a cocktail party and silent auction in their newly renovated auditorium, Crest Hall.

As residents enjoyed food and conversation, they placed bids on auction items donated by fellow residents. The auction raised an additional \$521 for the campaign.

"While the successes were celebrated with fun events, the campaign has a very serious mission of raising funds for an endowment that helps to offset the annual cost of benevolent care for residents who have exhausted their financial resources," says Carol Powers, annual fund director.

Diakon provides nearly \$8 million in benevolent care each year to residents within its senior living communities.

"The number of those in need gets higher each year," says Powers. "Diakon's goal is to grow the endowment to meet this growing need."

 To learn how you can help, please call the Office of Advancement at 1-877-DIAKON-7, option 2, extension 21290.


# Growing endowment fund honors retiring CEO

The Daun and Mary Jo McKee Endowment Fund for Children, established by Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries in recognition of the 14 years of organizational leadership of the Rev. Daun E. McKee, Ph.D., who is retiring, has already raised more than \$250,000.

The fund also honors McKee's 40 years of ordained ministry in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

The Daun and Mary Jo McKee Endowment Fund for Children is an endowment held by the Diakon Lutheran Fund and managed by its board. The annual release of funds will be directed by Daun and Mary Jo for a specified purpose within a Diakon program serving children.

Diakon has a nearly 150-year tradition of serving children through such services as adoption and foster care, adjudicated youth programs, child care, and counseling. The McKees have served as advocates for the needs of children throughout their personal and professional lives.

 Gifts to The McKee Endowment Fund for Children can be directed to The Office of Advancement, Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries, 798 Hausman Road, Suite 300, Allentown, PA 18104.



Daun and Mary Jo McKee

## Life-changing trip made possible by caring donors

This summer, participants of the Flight Program, a Diakon Wilderness Center service that helps to mentor former center students on independent living skills and other positive practices, decided to challenge themselves by hiking the Grand Canyon.

To make this dream a reality, Flight participants set out to raise funds to offset airfare and other costs by holding a Hike-A-Thon. As with a marathon, the young men set their sights on traversing the entire length of Pennsylvania's own Grand Canyon in Leonard Harrison State Park.

"With all of their food, supplies, and water strapped to their backs, they completed all 30 rugged miles in just under two days," says Rob Kivlan, program director.

"Their motivation came from the excitement of their upcoming trip to Arizona and the pride of following through with the challenge, as well as being able to fulfill their commitment to their sponsors, who donated through a per-mile-hiked or lump-sum donation," he says. "This experience proved to be one of the most challenging and rewarding accomplishments of their lives for many of them, and it was made possible only through the donations and encouragement of others."

Because of the generosity of more than 60 donors, almost \$4,500 was raised, essentially covering all the costs of the trip to Arizona for several of the young men. Participants who had often struggled with tasks were now finishing what they set out to accomplish by hiking the entire way down to the Colorado River and back in four days on one of the most challenging trails in the entire Grand Canyon.

As an added bonus, the young men went cliff-diving on the last day of the trip before returning home.

"The therapeutic element and serenity that these remote wilderness environments provide enabled everyone to engage in meaningful soul-searching and planning for successful futures upon returning home," says Kivlan. "We thank all our donors for making this dream a reality."



*Luther Crest's resident organist breaks in the community's new organ.*

### New organ for Luther Crest

Luther Crest, a Diakon Lutheran Senior Living Community in Allentown, Pa., has been undergoing major renovations and additions to its campus. Renovations to the commons area included a transformation of the auditorium, Crest Hall, into a gathering place for worship services, memorial services, and educational and informative presentations, as well as a variety of musical programs.

But one item also in need of replacement was the hall's aging organ, the cost of which had not been included in Luther Crest's 2009 capital budget. To purchase a new one, the "New Organ for Crest Hall at Luther Crest Campaign" was created as a donor-funded opportunity.

Luther Crest resident organist Ruth Rayna and chaplain Dianne Kareha spearheaded the fund-raising effort. Rayna was also a major donor to the cause.

Since the fall of 2008, 54 contributions totaling \$29,000 have been received from residents and friends. This October, a new Allen organ was installed and on Reformation Sunday, a dedication service was held with Rayna demonstrating the many capabilities of the new organ.

"I am making a very generous gift to the organ campaign because my mother was a resident of Luther Crest, and right up until her final days she just loved music," noted one contributor.

For many residents who no longer have the ability to travel, attending worship services where they live and having the ability to hear the new organ is truly a Godsend, says Kareha.

*For information on how you can contribute toward Luther Crest's new organ, please visit [www.diakon.org/luthercrest](http://www.diakon.org/luthercrest) or use the enclosed envelope to make a gift.*



*A Flight Program participant looks out over the Grand Canyon in Arizona.*



# Diakon Smart Homes attract attention

Some 300 people attended the first open house of what Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries describes as the “future of senior living.”

The first of two Diakon Smart Homes constructed on the campus of The Lutheran Home at Topton, a Diakon Senior Living Community in Topton, Pa., now serves as a model for the community’s planned expansion of senior living accommodations, as well as an illustration of how such features may allow older adults to grow older while remaining in their current residence.

The home is reportedly the only one of its kind currently on the East Coast to feature affordable universal-design components and leading-edge technology and may be the

first home in the nation to integrate so many “smart” features into its construction, says David Baker, Diakon chief information officer, who serves as a member of the national Commission for Aging Services Technology.

Planned and optional amenities and technology in the residence include behind-the-scenes sensors that make it possible to monitor the home in a non-intrusive manner, safety-focused lighting and controls designed to take into account changes that occur in an older person’s eyesight, wider hallways, minimal-threshold showers, and stovetop burners with pan-presence sensors.

The second of the two homes recently constructed will be occupied by residents who agree to take part in university-based studies of technology use.

In addition to area residents, state and other senior living officials were among those who toured the smart home during the open house.

“It’s awesome,” Eleanor Dreibelbis of Rockland Township told a newspaper reporter at the event. “This house is so smart it could even save your life.” ■



## New program helps at-risk youths be successful

The program helped the teen obtain both his GED and a job. More than that, “this program has helped me...to deal with my anger issues and hold myself accountable for my actions.”

But perhaps most importantly, “it has helped me gain my family’s trust again.”

Empowering teens to take control of their lives and succeed academically and socially is a goal of the Diakon Wilderness Center’s new Center Point Day Program. Designed as an alternative to placement of youths in residential facilities, the program focuses on behavioral management and progressive competency development.

Open to males ages 14 through 21, “the day program was established so youths can stay in their communities and learn different competency, life, and vocational skills while receiving job assistance and educational enrichment,” says Jeremias Garcia, program supervisor.


“The program allows us to walk through life with the students and help them to be successful.” Based in the challenging yet supportive outdoor environment of the wilderness center, the Center Point program engages youths and their families to understand accountability, build family-based strengths, develop a variety of life skills, and learn to invest in the value of positive community life.

“We want our youths to be productive, connected, and law-abiding members of their communities when they graduate from the program,” says Garcia.

The program accepts youths who are delinquent and dependent and may have social, drug, alcohol, or academic problems, and family dysfunction. Currently, the program serves youths referred by Adams and Cumberland counties in Central Pennsylvania.

“The exciting thing about this program is the ability to reach into the students’ communities to provide support,” adds Corey Carothers, wilderness center administrator. “We can easily go to where the students live and speak with their families, assist with job searches, and locate community activities and resources that can support the students. Being able to encourage change within the environment the students are going to live in after they are done with the program will have a long-term impact.”

The program is funded through county contracts along with several donors including South Middleton Township Parks and Recreation, which provides assistance with vocation, community service, and community outreach; ROCKS Tae kwondo LLC, offering character-fitness for the students during the week; The Helen D. Groome Beatty Trust of Bank of New York – Mellon, which donated \$50,000 (see Donor Blessings insert, page DB-1, for more information on this gift); and The Julius & Kathryn Hommer Foundation, which donated \$15,000 to assist with start-up costs. ■

 *The Center Point Day Program relies in part on the generous gifts of donors like you. To be a part of this great new wilderness center program, please use the enclosed envelope to make your important gift today.*

## Diakon House offers hope for families in need

It may be called Diakon House, but for families hopeful of building a life of self-sufficiency, it's called home.

Located at 2422 McElderry St., Baltimore, Diakon House is the latest addition to Baltimore Outreach Services' housing program. Growing out of a soup kitchen and homeless shelter operated by Christ Lutheran Church, Inner Harbor, BOS is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing housing, jobs, and education to impoverished women and children in the City of Baltimore.

The house was one of a series of houses Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries had purchased in Baltimore to rehabilitate for low- to moderate-income homeowners. Because of the need for transitional housing, Diakon sold the property at cost to the Christ Church program, which gutted and converted the house into two separate, multi-level, two-bedroom units. In recognition of the partnership, Christ Church decided to call the property Diakon House.

Diakon House serves families previously living in the BOS emergency shelter in the basement of Christ Church. Unlike other shelters that limit stays to 90 days, BOS allows residents to remain in the shelter until housing is available, as long as they work toward their goals of housing and self-sufficiency. ■■

# welcome home



## Two lives touched by tragedy, strengthened by faith



Isabella and Nanny



Nine-year-old Isabella can barely sit still. A visitor has come and she has much to share—songs from her favorite movie, the card game she loves to play, her swing, and everything else in her Nanny's backyard.

"Nanny" is Sara Minnich, a former team coordinator and longtime volunteer with Diakon Volunteer Home Care's Williams Valley Team in the Schuylkill/Northern Dauphin County region. Diakon Volunteer Home Care also serves residents in the Hazleton/Northeastern Pennsylvania and Berks County regions.

Isabella is Minnich's great-granddaughter and frequent visitor to her Tower City home. This year, one of their adventures together was a fund-raising walk benefiting Diakon Volunteer Home Care.

Isabella, the youngest volunteer, walked the full three miles and inspired everyone.

Minnich and Isabella share another very special bond, one born of a tragedy in their lives that became a triumph. When Isabella was just months old, she was shaken by someone. She spent 12 days in the

hospital and "died" twice, Minnich says. The infant's injuries caused neurological and visual impairments and her family didn't know whether she'd be able to develop and grow normally. But they rallied around her.

"We were determined to give her the best possible life we could," Minnich says. "We treated her like a 'normal' child and she responded that way."

Minnich speaks of the sadness and anger the family felt at first. She then learned more about Shaken Baby Syndrome. That set in motion Minnich's one-woman effort to teach as many people as possible about this issue. She bought materials and distributed them to local schools, health fairs, church groups, and babysitting instructors.

But she wanted to do more.

"After prayer and soul searching, I contacted our [then]-state representative, Bob Allen, about getting a law passed to give information to parents at the hospital when their babies are born," Minnich says. "I thought it was important to educate. Mr. Allen told me, 'If you want it done, I will do everything to help.'"

It took two years, during which Minnich testified in hearings about what she wanted the bill to accomplish and what it meant to her. When a vote finally was held, the bill passed unanimously.

Minnich says she learned enough about Shaken Baby Syndrome to know that Isabella is "miraculous." Many of the babies die, she explains. When she sees Isabella smelling her favorite flowers in the yard or blowing bubbles in the driveway, she can't help but smile. When she takes Isabella to church, the little girl's spirit brings joy to all around her.

"People think what I did was hard, but I don't see it that way," Minnich says. "I think in this story you can see how faith is at work. If you have a good cause and you believe in it, it's not hard at all." ■■

Because Diakon Volunteer Home Care services are provided free of charge, Diakon relies on the generosity of donors to make this ministry possible. To be able to continue to provide this free service, monetary donations and volunteer support remain crucial. Please use the enclosed envelope to give generously.

# Resident receives award for work benefiting the blind

■ Ruth Bogia has spent nearly a quarter of a century working on behalf of the blind, work that recently gained her national recognition.

A certified Braille transcriber who also has served as studio director for the Princeton unit of Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic, Bogia is currently a member of the Princeton Brailleists, a small group of older volunteers who make quality but inexpensive tactile maps and drawings for blind people of all ages.

The National Federation of the Blind recently presented the Bolotin Award to Bogia—a resident of Twining Village, a Diakon Lutheran Senior Living Community in Holland, Pa.—and the Princeton Brailleists for “outstanding contributions toward the integration of the blind into society.” The \$50,000 award, presented to Bogia at the Federation’s annual convention, will help the organization to procure new equipment for the preparation of map volumes.

“We are so honored to receive this award, and I felt so appreciated at the convention,” says Bogia. “The attendees were such amazing people and they were really interested in the work that we are doing.”

Bogia, 91, uses Braille programs on the computer to do parts of her project. “It is amazing the work that can be done in Braille on computer programs today. It is so beneficial for the blind and also helps us expedite our work,” she says.

The maps and drawings are created by hand in metal foil, then duplicated by a Thermoform process to make clear, sharp copies.

A four-volume atlas of North and South America was the first item completed. The group has completed 30 volumes and is currently creating maps for Africa, the final region to be included.

“It takes about six months to do one state and longer for an entire country,” Bogia says. “This is something that was needed but not supplied for blind students and individuals until several years ago. The time we spend producing these is well worth it.” ■



*Ruth Bogia with the National Federation of the Blind's Bolotin Award*

## DIALOG DIGEST

Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries as of mid-November was in the process of issuing approximately \$122 million of fixed-rate bonds. The purpose of the bond issue is to replace existing variable-rate debt with fixed-rate bonds and to provide approximately \$25 million in additional funds to continue expansion and renovation work at Diakon’s senior living communities. The restructuring of the variable-rate debt with fixed-rate debt was viewed very favorably by the credit rating agency Fitch, which maintained Diakon’s BBB+ credit rating, but revised its outlook on Diakon from negative to stable as a result of this financing. “We are pleased with this bond issuance and believe our ability to borrow funds during this challenging economic climate is a positive reflection on our disciplined and reasoned approach to managing our financial resources. Further, the ability to borrow additional funds supports our goal of serving more people,” says Richard Barger, CPA, Diakon’s chief financial officer.

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Diakon recently received a national Alexander Hamilton Award for its defined-benefit pension program. A defined-benefit pension is one in which all funds are contributed by the employer to benefit staff members. Diakon received the silver award at a ceremony in New York City; Honeywell, an international Fortune 500 corporation with around 128,000 employees, received the gold award in this category, while Zappos.com, an online shoe retailer, received the bronze award. Now in their 14th year, the awards are presented by Treasury & Risk Management magazine, a business publication for senior financial executives. “I think many at the ceremony were surprised that a smaller organization such as Diakon had a well-thought-out plan for funding pension costs and managing the plan’s assets to ensure long-term financial stability for the benefit of our valued employees,” says Barger.

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Diakon’s focus on advanced technology and universal design, uniquely combined in the Diakon Smart Home model constructed at The Lutheran Home at Topton, has received national attention. An article on Diakon’s cutting-edge effort appeared earlier this year in an issue of Senior Living Business. That article can be read online in the news section of Diakon’s Web site, [www.diakon.org](http://www.diakon.org).

# ‘Grandparent pen pals’ connect generations

Technology may have changed much of life, but Charlotte Goldberg, head of the Special Projects Committee at Twining Village, a Diakon Lutheran Senior Living Community in Holland, Pa., is working to make sure at least one treasured tradition remains alive and well—pen pals.

Goldberg’s niece, Molly, who lives in California, was so intrigued with the idea of becoming a pen pal with her aunt that she asked her teacher if her entire first-grade class might consider the pen-pal activity as a class project.

In January, the “Grandparents Pen Pal Group” was born. More than 19 youngsters and village residents began to handwrite letters, sharing their lives, stories, and day-to-day activities.

“They know most of us are grandparents, so they ask about our families and our grandchildren; there’s a connection there,” says Goldberg. “The



from left: (top) Doreen Murphy, Wes Sowerbutts, Charlotte Goldberg; (bottom) Mary Sowerbutts, and Ruth Bogia.

art of writing has disappeared with e-mails and now texting, so it is nice to know we are keeping this art alive through our program.”

Resident Wes Sowerbutts looks forward to hearing from Dillon, his pen pal. “Dillon said he was glad he knew me and that he liked me,” says Sowerbutts. “For me, it doesn’t get much better than that.”

Doreen Murphy, another resident, grew up in England, so her pen pal enjoys hearing about Doreen’s life there. “Although it is sometimes a challenge to decipher the words written by a 6-year-old, I think I do a pretty good job,” says Murphy. “Receiving a letter is truly the highlight of my day.”

Stephanie Dillon, Molly’s teacher, hopes to continue the program, expanding it to include a school in Africa. For now, Twining Village residents just hope the letters keep on coming. ■■



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