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STURGES RIDGE

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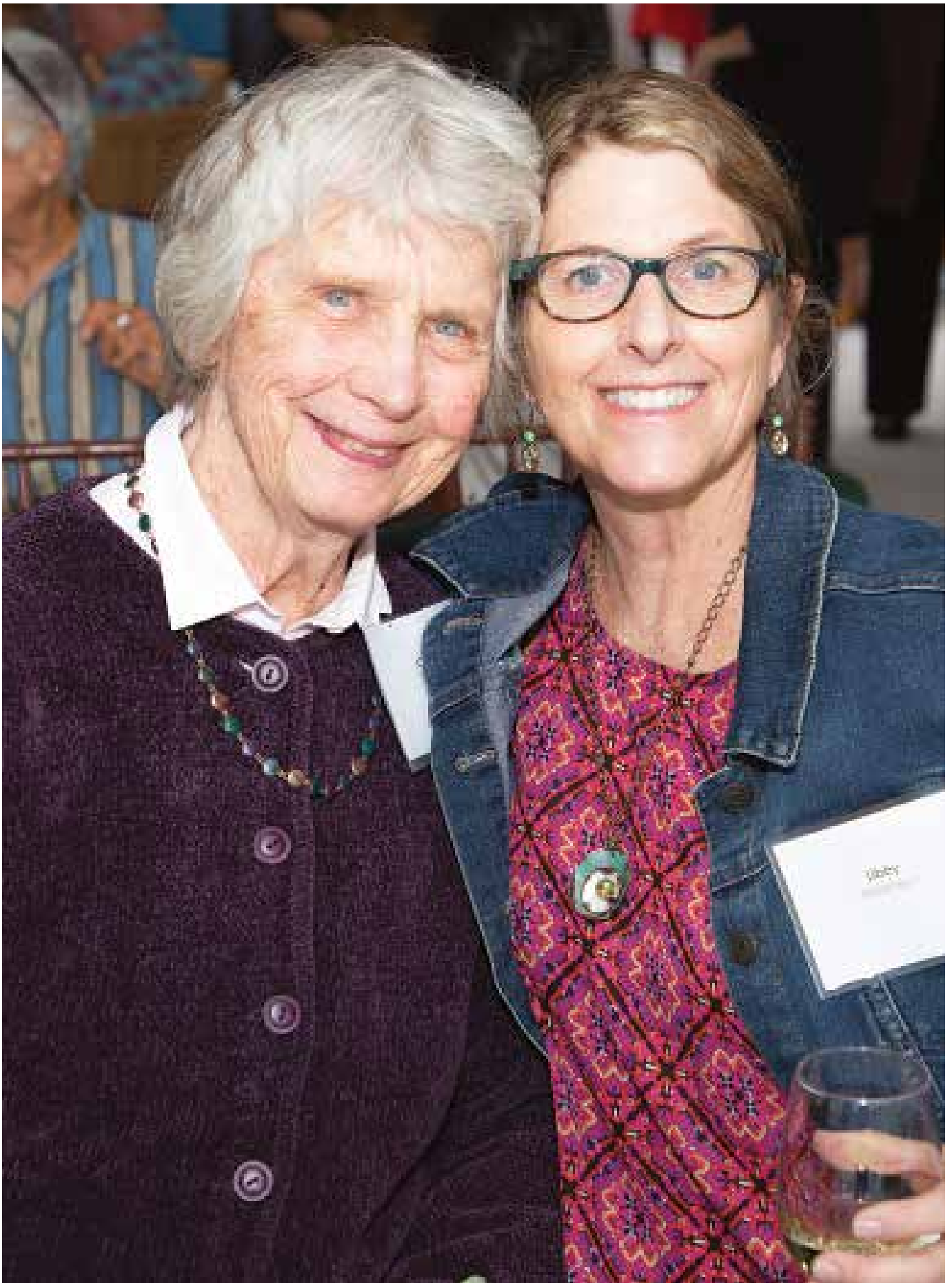
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A
Life
Line

*Lifestyle Director
Bernadette Plescia*



WINTER 2018



Founding resident and longtime Fairfielder, Cecily Zerega, and daughter Libby, enjoy the Sturges Ridge opening party.

What We Value at Benchmark: Human Connection

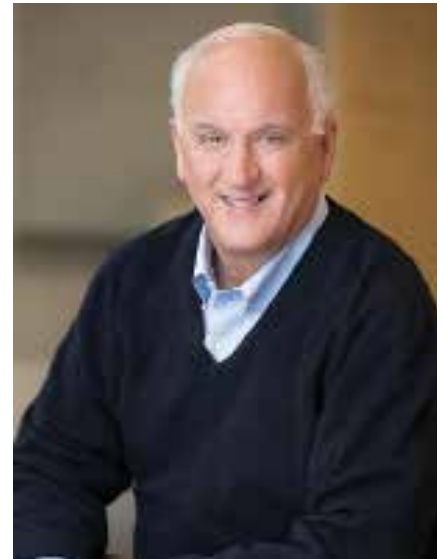
At Benchmark, we believe in the power of human connection to transform lives. Reflecting on our 21 years of experience, we know that what delights our customers most is not just the beautiful buildings, delicious food, and array of activities offered at all our communities. Rather, it's when our residents and their families experience a real connection with our staff and with the passions in their lives.

Recently, associates in our Mystic community learned that 10 year resident Bill had always wanted to go on the Sabino Dixieland Jazz Cruise. So, for his 90th birthday, they called the cruise operator, booked seats on the summer's last cruise, invited his niece and other residents, and celebrated with the band on the upper deck—Dixieland style!

Here at Sturges Ridge, new resident Elisa has become our “artist in residence.” Not only is her beautiful work on display in our third-floor gallery but she's also continuing her passion by donating supplies and teaching art classes to her fellow residents.

The goal of everyone at Benchmark is to deeply understand people like Bill and Elisa and connect them to what's meaningful and possible at every stage of their lives. And we've designed Sturges Ridge in a special way to singularly focus on providing these kinds of experiences that will set us apart—today and in the future.

That same transforming power of human connection touched me early in life. My mother, Lee Grape, loved Fairfield. While I was growing up here, she was an active volunteer, constantly “connecting” to things that mattered to people and the community. At our



September opening, one person after another came up to tell me how much she meant to them.

And Benchmark associates surprised me by naming the library at Sturges Ridge the Lee Grape Memorial Library. Seeing my mother's name and photos in a comfortable space where residents, families and associates will spend time together beautifully continues her legacy of transforming lives through human connection.

—Tom Grape, *Chairman and CEO, Benchmark*

WINTER 2018

UPFRONT

News, people and happenings at Sturges Ridge



TERRY'S CORNER

Wellness Abounds

A Place to Connect, to Learn and to Live

I love this time of the year. Families gather and reflect on memories and special moments, and there's a feeling of nostalgia and thankfulness all around.

At Sturges Ridge, our family continues to grow. Since we opened our doors on Sept. 27, residents have been moving in every week, and the neighborhood is coming alive. People who haven't seen one another in over 40 years are meeting again. Our dining room has become the gathering place for families and new friends. We are truly in

the hub of the town, close to everything and connecting to what matters to our residents. What a great location!

We are pleased to announce the creation of a "wellness-based" exercise program designed by Michael Catuccio, rehabilitation director of The Carolton physical therapy department. This supervised exercise program was developed by a physical therapist and implemented by a physical therapist aide. We have also partnered with Dr. Harsha Naik of the Northeast Medical Group, which is part

of the Yale New Haven Health System. Dr. Naik is a board-certified geriatrician who will see residents in the comfort of our onsite office.

Come in for a tour! Stay for lunch or dinner, and sample our daily programs, all designed to engage and connect in a purposeful way.

On behalf of the residents and associates of Benchmark's Sturges Ridge, I wish you and your family a very happy and healthy holiday season.

—Terry Hornikel, Executive Director

SAY HELLO TO...

Bernadette Plescia

Lifestyle Director, Empowering Residents

If you drop by Sturges Ridge on any given day, there's a good chance you will run into an effervescent, smiling associate who will be eager to help you, show you around, and most important—tell you what great things she has in store for the residents. That's Bernadette Plescia, Lifestyle Director.

Plescia grew up in Hamden and went to college in Rhode Island. After school she returned to live in Monroe, raising four kids with her husband and later moving to Newtown. Plescia earned degrees in human service and fine art, then went on to pursue a master's in elementary education. She worked with children but always had an affinity for seniors and longed to work with them. Six years ago she joined Benchmark Senior Living at The Village at East Farms in Waterbury. When the opportunity arose to join the community at Sturges Ridge, Plescia jumped at it. "I was excited to work with the Fairfield-based Benchmark staff and meet the residents there, as hard as it was to say goodbye to my friends at East Farms," says Plescia.

Her enthusiasm for her job is contagious. "It is an absolute privilege to know seniors and to help them live their best lives," she says. "I feel that they are the greatest generation in so many ways. They are honest and hard-working; they know the value of family and the value of a dollar!"

Plescia oversees all the day-to-day happenings for social interaction and activities for the residents, and also plans long-term programming. "I create a schedule of experiences based on what the residents want and hope to do," she explains. Often a typical day will start with a morning exercise program,



which can be anything from tai chi, to chair yoga, to Zumba, to a discussion on arthritis management. Plescia may take a group to volunteer at the library or hospital. Weekly outings may include apple picking, a trip to the movies, or dinner at a favorite restaurant. Sturges Ridge has its own bus and works with ride-sharing services to accommodate travel. There are art classes, dancing for those with Parkinson's, a knitting group, computer classes, brain games, baking groups, a men's group, and so much more.

"I am here to empower the residents to be an active part of their community and create and enjoy the pursuits they love." Plescia is also building a large volunteer program. She oversees partnerships with the local community schools and outside organizations to bring opportunities inside Sturges Ridge.

5 memory tips

Here are some tips from the National Center for Biotechnology Information to keep your mind sharp.

- ▶ **Reduce Sugar Intake:** Sweets have been linked to cognitive decline and poor memory. Limit desserts to special occasions, or choose dark chocolate (70 percent cacao or higher), which contains memory-boosting flavonoids.
- ▶ **Try Fish Oils:** Omega 3 essential fatty acids, found in salmon, trout, and albacore tuna, slows mental decline and may improve memory in older adults.
- ▶ **Sleep Well:** A good night's sleep helps you turn short-term memories into long-lasting ones. Seven to nine hours per night is optimal.
- ▶ **Practice Brain Games:** one study showed that playing games on a brain-training app for eight hours over four weeks improved memory.
- ▶ **Exercise:** Even 15 minutes can improve the development of neurons, which is important for brain health and memory. Exercise can also protect against dementia later. —Susan Maurer



A Great Reception

Sturges Ridge Joins a Welcoming Community

On Thursday, Sept. 27, the doors opened at 448 Mill Plain Road so the residents, staff, CEO, and town officials could toast the new Benchmark property, enjoy seasonal specialties, and tour Fairfield's first senior lifestyle community. Nurses, chefs, staff, neighbors, and town officials listened in as Fairfield Chamber of Commerce director Beverly Balaz welcomed Sturges Ridge to the community, and CEO Tom Grape spoke about what Fairfield means to him. A large ribbon was cut by Executive Director Terry Hornikel, first resident Cecily Zerega, and Tom Grape. The backdrop on the mild day was the Fairfield Ludlowe High School football field. In fact, Fairfield Ludlowe football players joined in to help clean up after the event.

Lifestyle director Bernadette Plescia arranged for the team and its coach to help out. Plescia has other special community volunteer programs in the works. The Suzuki School is sending students to play music once a month, there's an Adopt a Grandparent program with the Unquowa School, the Fairfield County Children's Choir FCCC will perform for the holidays, and acapella groups from area high schools will also sing for the residents into the holidays. "Our goal is to provide activities that are engaging, enriching and socially meaningful based on the wants and needs of our residents," says Plescia. "Every day at Sturges Ridge is a chance to bring joy to the people living there."

Photos by Regina Madwed, Capitol Photo.





A Special Day Champagne glasses were filled and sipped as over 200 people gathered to celebrate opening day of Sturges Ridge. Chef Jamey Patterson and his team prepared delicious gourmet small bites of filet and duck, and there was also sushi, lobster, and a decadent raw bar. A tour showcased the lovely apartments as well as "journey stations" where residents may interact with items that engage their minds and memories. When you enter Sturges Ridge, don't miss the tribute in the foyer to CEO Tom Grape's mother, Lee, an active member of the Fairfield community. Founding resident, Jan Perry, and daughter, Virginia, were excited to be at the opening. "I am so happy to be here and look forward to dinner with my friends," says Jan.



The Science of Memory

Corporate Director of Mind & Memory, Michelle Tristani

BY ROBIN H. PHILLIPS



As an experienced memory care specialist and adult and geriatric speech pathologist, Michelle Tristani leads all of Benchmark's Mind & Memory services and training. She is a mentor, leader and educator in dementia and memory care and lives in the Boston area with her husband, college freshman son and teenage daughter.

What led you to the field of memory and dementia care? I love the brain! I find it fascinating that a three-pound structure can govern all body systems, movements, thoughts and, most important to me, memories. I've had a right-sided hearing loss since childhood, and this led me to the field of medical speech pathology. I've had the pleasure of working with older adults for more than 25 years, and my appreciation for their knowledge, experience, wisdom, and humor is enhanced every day.

Describe a typical day for you. I travel to our communities throughout the Northeast—Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont. The day typically consists of reviewing the programs and initiatives in the Mind & Memory neighborhood; training associates on our Mind & Memory approach; meeting with residents, families and outside medical professionals and providers; interviewing families struggling with memory loss; and facilitating support groups.

How does one prepare and train to be a director of memory care? The learning never ends, and we all are humbled in the face of dementia. I believe a foundation would be pursuing a degree in nursing, occupational therapy, speech pathology, social

work or recreational therapy with a specialty in geriatric care and dementia. There is a great deal of literature, resources, and online seminars to participate in, and we must take advantage of every opportunity to gain and retain knowledge and skills related to this devastating disease. This is how we learn to provide quality of life through every stage of the disease.

How do you train staff to be sensitive to those with memory loss? The most effective training consists of virtual dementia situations, such as dementia simulation, role-play and real-time coaching, hands-on practice, and case studies. We have a variety of training types and topics focusing on making connections and communicating effectively with a person living with memory loss.

What are some things we can do in interactions with people and loved ones who have memory loss? First, have knowledge of all the person's interests, passions and abilities. It is also very beneficial to know the type and stage of dementia and then tailor the interaction and engagement to that person's individualized abilities and interests. Always validate the person's feelings and emotions. Typically, we can modify an interaction to allow for a positive and effective outcome, and even create new experiences and lasting memories for all.

What do you enjoy most about your job? Undoubtedly, I enjoy meeting with nursing assistants through hands-on training to improve resident care and engagement for persons living with dementia.

What do you do for fun? I run half marathons and relays with friends, watch my daughter's softball games, ride waves at the beach, and have as many family and friend gatherings as possible.

What's the best advice you have ever been given? From my father: "Time is the most precious thing that one person can give to another—you never know how much of it you have." He also says, "Get up every morning and answer the bell, do the best you possibly can. No one can ask for more than that."

What do you think is important for the future of memory care? While home environments using technology can be of help, I hope that robotic devices do not become a main focus in memory care because they could encourage less human and personal connection, which is of the utmost importance. I also believe there's a need for enhanced training to maximize care partner competency in communication techniques, fostering connections, and engagement.

Balance on the Inside

Why Bones and Bacteria Need Your Attention

BY SUSAN MAURER

“I need to find balance in my life,” goes the common phrase from both young and old. While we all strive for balance in our quality of life, there is now more importance being placed on maintaining different types of balance within the body to prevent disease, which can set you up for a higher quality of health and longevity down the road.

From the Outside In

There are two types of balance that are critical for health. The first is stability, which is a proven way to prevent falls as we age and can protect us from the dreaded hip fracture. According to the Centers for Disease Control, 95 percent of hip breaks in older adults are caused by falling, and each year over 300,000 people are hospitalized as a result. Exercise helps prevent falls by strengthening your muscles—especially your legs—so that you can more easily stabilize yourself if you

trip or stumble and have to steady yourself from a fall. Simple strength-training exercises with weights or fitness bands are easy, portable, and does not require a gym membership, but you can also check out the Fairfield YMCA and Bigelow Senior Center, which offer balance classes.

Yoga and tai chi are other options but if you're not interested in a class, even walking is good for balance, especially if you practice walking on uneven ground (the sand at Fairfield's beaches is great for that). When all else fails, practice standing on one foot while you wait in line, or work on getting up and down from a chair without using your hands. Even the smallest efforts will pay off. Also keep in mind that your balance may be better on one side versus the other, and hydration can greatly affect balance from day to day, so remember to drink water.

And the Inside Out

The other type of balance is the kind of homeostasis that occurs in the gut, or, technically speaking, the microbiome,

where 40 trillion bacteria have set up shop in your large intestines. Today, more attention is being given to the link between an unbalanced GI tract, which is surrounded by 70 percent of our immune system, and that makes our beneficial bacteria critical to good health. They digest fiber, which helps weight loss, diabetes, and heart disease; they communicate with your immune system to help fight infection; and they maintain brain health by communicating with the central nervous system. Foods like bananas (not overripe), garlic, onions, asparagus, leeks, and beans are great fuel for the bacteria that are working hard to keep you healthy, but any legumes, vegetables and fruit are great sources. You can also try adding a probiotic to your diet. And it's worth noting that in studies, bacteria do not like artificial sweeteners.

So, here's hoping we'll all eat well tonight, and maybe the multitaskers out there will try doing that while balancing on one foot. Your muscles, bones and 40 trillion bacteria will thank you.



Soaring Together

Bill and Mary Jo Cornell's Historic Relationship

BY ROBIN H. PHILLIPS



Sitting down to listen to Bill and Mary Jo Cornell, Fairfielders for over 70 years, is a bit like riding a time machine back to several important historic moments. The couple's stories and their photos make it all come alive. Bill, 101 this year, spent much of World War II flying B-24s at Texas Air Force base, training others in their use. Mary Jo, 94, also loved flying and hoped to be a WASP, Women Airforce Service Pilots, a civilian women pilots' organization, whose members were U.S. federal civil service employees. Bill and Mary Jo met in Texas and bonded over their affinity

for aviation, "I also loved his red hair," says Mary Jo with a twinkle in her eye. "For me that was all I needed to see." They were married, and while Bill is from Pennsylvania, Mary Jo grew up in Bridgeport, one of two daughters of a single, hard-working Italian-American mom who was a hairdresser. "She did everything for me and my sister and worked so hard," says Mary Jo. "I went to Booth and Balise Business School, and then got a job at Sikorsky—working directly for Igor Sikorsky!" It was war-time and exciting for Mary Jo to be part of a company building airplanes and helicopters.

After the war, Bill was in the lumber

business and became a buyer for Whipple's Lumberyard in Elmira, N.Y. A great lover of the beach, Mary Jo missed Connecticut and the shore. "Everything wonderful about Fairfield starts at the beach," says Mary Jo. They began their lives on James Street, but then moved to a shingled home on Lalley Boulevard where they stayed for over 40 years and had their three children, Jeff, Linda and Katie. As soon as he got to Fairfield, Bill found work as the head buyer for Ring's End Lumber in Darien, a position he held for 25 years, and then worked part-time for another 25.

Because of Mary Jo's involvement with the war effort, The Rosie the

Riveter Organization recently came to interview her for a story. “I’m so proud of all the work we women did to help during the war,” says Mary Jo. Indeed, Mary Jo always kept busy working and with community activities like directing Girl Scout troops. Mary Jo is a bit famous around town because she was one of the founding members of the Committee to Preserve the Fairfield Shoreline. Cornell and a group of neighbors joined forces in the '70s to save Penfield Pavilion from the wrecking ball, and prevent condo developments from being built. Much of the beauty of our shoreline we owe to Mary Jo and her group of activists. With their three kids, seven grand-kids, and eight great-grandchildren, the family loves getting together and recently had a big celebration for Bill’s 101st birthday. Daughter Linda Downey says, “We also had a 99th and a 100th too!” How do they keep so youthful and healthy? “We have never eaten junk,” pipes in Mary Jo. “I go to the gym every day,” says Bill. They are delighted to be closer again to their kids by living in Sturges Ridge, and are excited to have one of the apartments overlooking the Fairfield Ludlowe football field.



Artist-in-Residence

BY ROBIN H. PHILLIPS

GROWING UP IN WORCESTER, MASS., as a first generation American and the daughter of 1915 Armenian genocide survivors, Elisa Khachian poured her thoughts, dreams, ideas, and emotions into her art. From a young age, she was always creating, painting, and drawing. “My art—every piece I create—is telling a story from my life,” she explains. Elisa’s household was filled with creative types. Her mother, aunt, and grandmother were adept at such handiwork as sewing lace and needlepoint. “Something artistic and interesting was always going on around me,” explains Khachian. Her father was a hard-working immigrant who ran a successful rug import business, Tufenkjian & Co., and in his spare time tended his rose garden and listened to classical music. “My biggest influence was my high school art teacher who told me I had to go to RISD,” says Khachian, referring to the Rhode Island School of Design. A Fairfield resident since 1960, Khachian has over 1,000 pieces in her portfolio, with several shows and exhibitions behind her,

“Sturges Ridge is so honored to have Elisa as a resident and to showcase a selection from her prolific body of work,” says Executive Director Terry Hornikel. Many multi-media pieces tell a story or have a personal connection for Elisa. “I am very pleased and excited to be the first exhibitor in the lovely Sturges Ridge Art Gallery,” Elisa says. “I am also looking forward to teaching art to whomever would like to work with me in the beautiful art classroom!”

The public is encouraged to stop in and take a look at her work.

Irish Eyes Are Smiling

Meet Resident Ann Monk, from a 100 Acre Irish Farm to Fairfield

BY SARAH GAUTHIER GALLUZZO



Ann Monk came to Connecticut as a fresh-faced Irish lass at the age of 17. She has a lovely, lilting Irish accent and a sardonic wit. “Don’t call it a brogue; it’s an accent, just like people from anywhere else would have,” Ann says.

Ann has lived in Fairfield for many years. Before she settled in Fairfield for good, she enjoyed traveling with her husband, George. She met George while square dancing in Huntington, and he clearly stole her heart. “I was 25 when we met—imagine!” Wistful, she continues, “He was the nicest man you ever met. So kind, so well

mannered.” They wed within two years of that fateful square dance and began plans to start a family.

Ann enjoyed the early years of marriage and lots of travel. When George was stationed in the Air Force, the family traveled all over the United States, including Hawaii, Texas, and the Carolinas, as well as many places in Europe. Yet downtown Fairfield will always feel like home.

For Ann, finding the right senior living community was as simple as following the three basic rules of real estate: Location. Location. Location.

“Choosing Sturges Ridges was purely mom’s decision,” son David explains. “She loves downtown Fairfield, she

lived there for many years, and she’s happy to be so close again.” Ann’s Irish eyes smile as she tells me she cannot wait to return downtown. She has been living temporarily with her son David and his family in Greenfield Hill, which she jokingly refers to as “the country.”

“Even though I grew up on a 100-acre farm in Ireland, I just can’t stand living in the country. It’s so isolating.” An outgoing person, Ann has many established relationships in town and is looking forward to making even more friends. She is active in the Gaelic American Club, the Senior Center, and St. Thomas Parish.

“I’m looking forward to having a place downtown where my friends can visit me—and my grandchildren. This will be good.”

Ann grew up in a large family with a twin brother and six other siblings. She also has two children, five grandchildren, and many nieces and nephews. She lovingly shares pictures in what looks like an ancient photo album. Her family both here and in Ireland is clearly a top priority for Ann. She also shares pictures of the patients she worked with at the Carolton, where she was a private duty nurse’s aid for over 20 years. She cared deeply for her patients and has a true understanding of eldercare. “I’m not a person for sitting around,” she says, “I like a lot of activity.”



Volunteering During Retirement

BY SUSAN MAURER

MOST OF US VOLUNTEER because we want to make a difference in the world. Even a few hours can make a positive mark on an organization's overall good efforts. There are many wonderful charities that are ready and willing to take on helpers—young and old alike— and for a few hours or a full-time commitment.

For those who are retired, volunteering also offers additional benefits. If you've ever asked yourself, "Now what?" you may want to consider some of the positive side effects that are naturally derived from charitable work.

Volunteering gives us a purpose, and, in turn, keeps us active, connected, and social. These aspects of living after the working years are over, are what also support a healthy, happy, longer life as we age. As Joanne Fritz, from The Balance Small Business says about volunteerism, "We notice a subtle shift in ourselves. We feel more connected to others, and we become less absorbed in the normal stresses of daily life." Most who volunteer report an increase in friends, emotional stability, and self-esteem. In fact, in the Blue Zones of the world, where populations live the longest and are the healthiest, social engagement comes up as a top contributing factor.

But there are also physical health benefits that come from volunteering. For instance, one report in the journal *Health Psychology* showed that those who give their time for 100 hours each year are some of the healthiest. Another study showed that people who volunteer may be at lower risk for dementia.

Give Time

Sturges Ridge lifestyle director Bernadette Plescia helps residents connect locally to volunteer. Here are some places to start as you think about the best way to engage with the community.

Fairfield Public Library is a great resource with over 25 organizations in the area that welcome volunteer support. The library is always looking for volunteers, too. fairfieldpubliclibrary.org/our-community/volunteer-opportunities/

Volunteer Match matches people who want to volunteer with organizations that are looking for help. You can choose filters to narrow the search. volunteermatch.org/search

Retired Brains is geared specifically to retirees. Click on the links provided on the site to find local chapters. retiredbrains.com/volunteer.html



STYLISH STURGES DIGS



Amenities Galore The apartments range from studios to two bedrooms, all with spacious baths and kitchenettes. The outdoor patio has seasonal décor and is perfect for visiting with family and having a meal al fresco. There's a gym, and a salon with room for two stylists, as well as a dedicated massage room. There's also a private kitchen and dining area for families to cook and entertain together.



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