

Avila News and Views

A publication of the Resident Council at Avila Retirement Community

Albany, NY

October 2022

A RAINBOW OVER THE LODGE



On a recent evening Leslie Davis was able to capture this photo of a rainbow forming when she returned home to the Lodge.

DID YOU EVER WONDER ABOUT THE FLOWERS HERE AT AVILA?

By Tom Fitzgerald

Where do all the flowers come from that bless the Avila community? Our reception area, dining rooms, Bistro and corridors have live flowers on display. Do you wonder where they come from? Who arranges the beautiful vases? Well, the answer is that every week, on Wednesday morning at 8:00, a dedicated group of Avila residents gather in the craft room at the main building and in the dining room at the Lodge to arrange the many vases of live flowers that add joy to our hearts. We thank them for their work and some of us might like to join them on Wednesdays.

In addition, flowers arrangements appear on the tables of each floor and reception areas. Who does these arrangements? Joyce Gibbs has quietly taken on this role to beautify our surroundings. We thank her and those who help her to beautify our lives here at Avila. Thank you to all those involved in these efforts.

MEET OUR NEW NEIGHBORS AND STAFF MEMBER

ELIZABETH HAMMER

Interviewed by Pat Binzer



Photo by Patricia Binzer

Elizabeth Hammer came to Avila from Chelsea, MI, a small town of 5,000 people, a suburb of Ann Arbor, where she and her husband had lived for more than 45 years. Make no mistake, Elizabeth is not your typical small-town woman.

She was raised by parents who were in the military, which meant moving and changing schools about every two years. She remembers vividly going to 6th and 7th grade in Morocco. There were also schools in California, Washington, DC and north Florida, where she finished high school and college. Although Elizabeth became accustomed to moving and resettling, she had not developed a sense of a "homebase."

Her first significant college experience, at Florida State, was attending a "Get Acquainted event" where she met another student, named Frank Hammer, who also had been raised by military parents. They were married

the week after graduation and chose to settle in Chelsea, MI. For the first time they were able to answer the question: where are you from? Frank finished graduate school in Ann Arbor, MI. They began rehabbing an 1890s Victorian house and raising four children. Son Erich now lives in Albany, while his brother and two sisters are in other states.

Elizabeth is always curious and has a passion for learning and moving on to new challenges in her academic field. Beginning as a classroom teacher, she finished her first master's degree and became a program and curriculum specialist. As Erich was about to enter college, she discovered it would be to the family's financial advantage for her to become a student again. Little by little this led to Elizabeth Hammer, PhD. She has been a college instructor, school psychologist, and most recently worked in a neuropsychic clinic doing testing and evaluations.

Along with her growing professional career, Elizabeth found time to travel extensively. She and Frank took advantage of daughter Mercedes' State Department postings, taking trips to India twice. There were many trips to Europe as well as Viet Nam, Cambodia, Australia, New Zealand, and South America. Each trip brought her home more excited about the many cultural differences she uncovered with each trip. Along the way she was an active advocate for various political causes and campaigns.

Then on January 14, 2020, everything changed. Elizabeth was in a horrific automobile accident, which left her confined to a wheelchair. The road to recovery was long and required physical therapy which continues today. Her beloved 1890s home could not be retrofitted for wheelchair accessibility. In consultation with Frank and their children, the decision was made to leave their home. Avila was well-known to her son and daughter-in-law in Albany and was given high marks as a solution. Elizabeth stayed in Michigan in a rehab center and Frank came to Avila, which he loved. Frank died unexpectedly before Elizabeth could move to Avila. The plan for her to move to Avila continued and she is now an active member of our community who loves reading and talking about her experiences and still loves being a student.

MARGARET HART

By John Wagner

Margaret Sullivan Hart was born in Potsdam NY. She attended the elementary school on the campus of SUNY Potsdam. As SUNY Potsdam was a teacher's college, Margaret experienced and enjoyed many student teachers. She earned her degree in education at Potsdam and then came to Saint Rose in Albany for her master's degree. For many years after that she enjoyed teaching first grade students in Public School 16 (now known as Pine Hills). Margaret has fond memories of seeing "the light come on" when a student suddenly realizes they know how to read.

Margaret met her future husband, James, a representative of a pharmaceutical firm, at a casual neighborhood party. After getting married, they had four children, a boy and three girls. College saw the children scattered around the country, but they all came back to Albany to raise their families. Margaret now has 13 grandchildren and 3 great grandchildren. Margaret has warm memories of the many family get-togethers when after dinner the grandchildren would all retire to another room and the adults could then talk like grownups.

After Jim's death about 10 years ago, Margaret continued her volunteer work in Mater Christi parish in Albany and a local food pantry. She also enjoyed her book club of 30 years. Since moving into Avila about six weeks ago, Margaret has enjoyed bingo and Trivial Pursuit and plans to look into other activities as well.



Photo courtesy of Avila Admin. staff

ANN MARIE HISLOP

Interviewed by Pat Binzer



Photo by Patricia Binzer

Ann Marie didn't have far to go when she moved to Avila. She has always lived in the Albany area, and she graduated from "VI" like many other Avila residents. Once she was working, and after living in several apartments, she decided it was time to buy a home because she wanted a dog. She knew she was always going to be single with no children. She decided if she wanted to have a family, it was going to be a dog. In 1994, she bought herself a home in the Village of Colonie and got a dog.

She had a 37-year career with New York state. For the last 27 years of that career, she worked in IT (Information Technology). She worked with mainframes and programs back when the technology was new. When Ann Marie started in IT in 1977, they didn't have the kids graduating from college with the degrees. They were just starting to get them, so the state had to train their clerical staff. She learned computer languages and different IT things and worked her way up within IT from Grade 13 to Grade 25.

For several years Ann Marie volunteered at the St. John/St. Ann's Outreach Center. She would purchase all the food and get it down to the center. Some people came and they served, others worked in the kitchen. All the volunteers made sure everybody was taken care of. The work was very rewarding, serving some of the nicest people. She said she got more out of it than she put into it. It's not what you're giving, but what you take home, the personal rewards of volunteering. It was one of the more pleasurable things in her life.

She said she had no hobbies, but she read a lot. In fact, she was a historical romance novel junkie. The novels were usually set in England in the Regency period. When they closed her house, she estimated they got rid of nearly a thousand books.

Ann Marie came to Avila because she had a mobility problem, and everything Avila could offer was exactly right for her situation. She had a series of falls, and the last one sent her to the hospital and then to Troy for PT. When she got out of there, she knew she could no longer live on her own. In addition to offering everything she needed, Avila is so close to where she used to live her friends can come over here to visit.

When asked what she likes about living at Avila, this was her response: "Very much everything. I love the people and the food program. How do you beat the food program? I like all of it. The staff is wonderful. The residents are wonderful. The service is fantastic. I have PT right below me." Welcome to Avila Ann Marie.

THOMAS AND DENNIS MURPHY

By Tom and Ellen Fitzgerald

We welcome the Murphy brothers to our Avila community. One recent morning, we sat with them as they recounted some of the highlights of their journey from their longtime home in Queens county to the rural countryside of Westerlo and finally to Avila.

Tom and Dennis recalled their family home on 79th Street in Middle Village where their father worked as a union plumber specializing in the repair and maintenance of gasoline pumps and other gas station equipment. He was a beloved fixture in the neighborhood affectionately called, "the mayor of 79th Street." Their mother devoted herself to her home and family. Both boys attended the local Catholic grammar school.

For high school Tom rode the subway into Manhattan each day to attend De La Salle High School and upon graduation joined the Air Force, completing four years of active duty. He returned to the family home and worked in Flushing for 28 years for a power supply manufacturer, moving up to production engineering manager. Meanwhile, Dennis after high school and completing an associate in community college then graduated Pace University in lower Manhattan. He then pursued a lengthy career in printing and graphic design.

In 2000, a year after their mother's death, the brothers realized that their Queens neighborhood had changed over the course of the years, and they decided to move upstate, settling on an 11-acre property in Westerlo complete with woods, a view of the Catskills, and a pond where they embraced the beauty of rural life. To their mutual delight, their 87-year-old father, who was reluctant to leave the family home, came with them on the closing day. After seeing the house and the natural beauty that surrounded it, he never returned to Queens. Their father shared their home until his death in 2003.

In Westerlo, they became acquainted with Margaret and Peter Sedlmeir at St. John's Church. Deacon Peter enlisted Dennis in his home ministry, visiting the sick and homebound and bringing communion to them. When Dennis found the Sedlmeirs were moving to Avila, he investigated.

After 22 years in the Catskills, they found a home again at Avila. They remarked about the aura of peace and quiet, the friendliness of others, the kindness of the staff always willing to help, and, of course, the quality of the food, which are among the most attractive features of living here. Dennis especially loves the proximity of the Pine Bush Preserve and is eager to pursue his hobby of bird watching!

Welcome, Tom and Dennis. We are happy to have you here.



Photo by Tom and Ellen Fitzgerald

AMANDA DESARBO

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Interviewed BY John Wagner



We are pleased to profile Amanda DeSarbo, who recently joined the staff here at Avila as the Chief Administrative Officer.

Amanda was born and raised in Schenectady, New York. She, her brother, and her two sisters grew up in a tightly knit family whose frequent gatherings reinforced the cultural values of a typical Italian-American family.

Amanda attended Schenectady County Community College. She earned a degree in early childhood education. She was first employed by the New York State Trooper Foundation, a non-profit organization that serves the community of police officers who keep us safe. After that time, she was employed by Peregrine Senior Living in Clifton Park, which is an assisted memory care facility. After almost a dozen years, she came to join us here at Avila.

She has a 15-year-old son, Keyon, the light of her life. Keyon is an honor student at Mohonasen High School, where he is active in football, basketball, and track. Amanda is also an avid sports fan, following the fortunes of the New York Yankees baseball team, the

New York Giants football team, and the Miami Heat basketball team. She has also visited the home courts of several teams in the Eastern Conference of the NBA (National Basketball Association). Amanda also loves going on cruises. She has been on more than 15, mostly to the Caribbean, occasionally going twice in a year.

Amanda was warmly welcomed by the Avila community upon her arrival and looks forward to many happy years here.

PROTESTANTS WELCOME NEW SPIRITUAL LEADER

By Karl Gohlke

The Protestant congregation at Avila is pleased to welcome the Reverend Jane T. Brady-Close to lead its monthly services on the first Friday of the month at 1 p.m. Rev. Brady-Close is the rector at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Albany.

Rev. Brady-Close brings to the Avila group a ministry particularly addressed to the older adults. She is the co-founder of a collegial group of clergies based at the Princeton Theological Seminary. She is ecumenical in religious orientation and is well-suited for the Protestant group at Avila, a welcoming congregation.

The Protestant group at Avila is open to Avila residents who would like to join in the monthly service and fellowship.

ON BEING A CHAPLAIN

By Father Leo O'Brien

To consider the place of the chaplain in our home at Avila one needs to answer the questions 'what' or 'who' is Avila.

And so, we look to our mission statement in the resident handbook:

"Avila is an independent living community that provides housing for seniors who wish to live in their own apartment or house, who want to be part of a larger community of people; a place for people of all faiths, race, creed or lifestyles; a place with services and amenities that support active, healthy and independent lifestyles. We are committed to excellence and to engaging and enriching the lives of our residents by offering choice, opportunity and access to the programs and services that will enhance their independence and allow them to age in place safely and with dignity."

And so, a chaplain's presence is neither to pose as a superior or a director or 'the answer' nor to impose a standard or an expectation

Instead, the chaplain is one with his own values and yet one called to listen, to affirm, to connect, to assist with what is going on in one's life.

A Catholic chaplain is to offer the two Catholic sacraments of healing, reconciliation (or confession) and anointing of the sick (or extreme unction) whenever asked or needed.

The chaplain is to be with and support interreligious and ecumenical activities and services, such as the annual remembrance of those Avila residents who have passed and the annual celebration of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Additionally, the Avila chaplain is to encourage and support the services of the Avila rabbi and the attending Protestant minister.

Sometimes, life's journey needs reflection: stories of the past, the daily efforts of the moment, wonders and worries about our tomorrows,

- sometimes, seemingly coincidentally, a quiet conversation leads to some understanding and a bit of peace
- sometimes a spoken word over a worried concern can find relief,
- and sometimes a short chat can lead to a reviving of spirit.

Perhaps sometime the chaplain could listen to you, an Avila resident. As chaplain I pray for all of you—may your journey be meaningful and peaceful.

ODE

By Joe Shapiro

When my father died — Leon Julian Shapiro — I drove to his funeral from our home in the country. Gripping the wheel of the slow-moving Volkswagen Camper, its weight in the rear, difficult to hold steady on the road, we passed an entrance to the Palisades Parkway. No cars in sight, we were the only one, lumbering along.

A Cadillac emerged, sped in front of us, hovered in front of my lumbering vehicle, and then sped off. It bore a New Jersey plate with the following: "L J S." Nothing else.

A memorable trip.

ECUMENICAL RELATIONS IN OUR AREA

By Rev. Fr. James Kane

Dear Avila friends,

Even though under Catholic auspices, Avila is a multi-faith community, and, in that spirit, I would like to offer a few perspectives on ecumenical/interfaith affairs in our Capital District

I do so from the perspective of 40 years as director of ecumenical and religious affairs at the R.C. Diocese of Albany. Margaret Sedlimier, an Avila resident, was a member of our diocesan commission for six years, as was Deacon Bob Brady and Deacon Earle Flatt, who's widow, Beth, is part of the Avila family

Let's begin at the beginning; the Dongan Charter that founded the city of Albany in 1686 (second oldest in U.S.) was the first in the new world to guarantee religious liberty. First Church (Dutch Reformed) Albany, the oldest pulpit in the U.S. provided sanctuary for Isaac Jogues, a Jesuit missionary to the Native Americans.

There is a fairly large Jewish community in our area and the Vatican has stated that the Albany Diocese is his second best in the country in Jewish-Catholic relations. Between our cathedral and the NYS Museum there stands a sculpture "Portrait," of a Jew and Christian in embrace, to commemorate our good relations.

There are nine mosques in our area. Particularly post 9-11, I've given many presentations on Islam in the Capital District to dissipate ignorance about Muslims/Islam.

The oldest Episcopal cathedral in the U.S. is All Saints, Albany, the Catholic cathedral, the second oldest, and both are in a covenant relationship, committed to ecumenical activities together. I'm honored to be an Honorary Canon of All Saints.

The local Capital Area Council of Churches, which includes Protestant, Orthodox and Catholic membership, sponsors a Baptismal Witness program where members travel to area churches for baptisms, to bear witness that it is the one sacrament we share in common. Troy United Area Ministries (TAUM) has an ecumenical board and outreach, as does the Schenectady Community Missions (SiCM). All three organizations interact with the local Black churches and host Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King events.

When Albany hosted a Billy Graham crusade in 1990 that forged ongoing ecumenical relations with Evangelicals. The local Bruderhof community is ecumenically active. There is an ecumenical "Festival Celebration" choir in our area, as well as a youth interfaith story circle.

Our area colleges, Saint Rose and Siena, both provide interfaith scholarships: the Sidney Albert Leadership at C.S.R. (including Hindu/Buddhist/Muslim/Jewish/Christian board members) and the Institute for Jewish-Christian studies at Sienna.

My hope and prayer are for ongoing fruitful ecumenical and interreligious relations in a growing secular world, filled with tensions and conflicts, that good interfaith and ecumenical relations can help allay.

WHAT ARE YOU READING NOW!

By Tom Fitzgerald

The Avila community appeals to people for many reasons. Michelle tells us that prospective residents always ask about activities available to residents and comment positively on the library (fiction and non-fiction), organized by MaryEllen Lee, and the Meditation Room (religion books and miscellaneous magazines). They also see the book collections on each floor and rightly surmise we are a reading community. So true!

Many of us ask, "What are you reading now?" Research tells us that we need to continue learning and expanding our knowledge to remain engaged. Reading is one answer to that challenge. Avila maintains its own library collection and provides transportation to the Guilderland Library.

One of the most active Avila groups is our monthly Book Club meetings on the third Tuesday of each month under the direction of Erin Teichman. The 15-25 members discuss both fiction and non-fiction books while commenting on the book's plot, characters, and writing style. The discussions are an opportunity to reflect on how the book's content interacts with our life experiences. The result? —a lively discussion where we contribute, listen and suggest future "reads." The Book Club is one of the most stimulating groups supporting Avila's philosophy of community involvement activities.

Join us if you feel the need to expand your horizons. We wonder, "What are you reading Now?"

GENERAL RELATIVITY

By John Wagner

At the end of the 19th century, physicists were comfortable with their Newtonian view of the universe. Isaac Newton's laws of motion and his universal law of gravity, when coupled with Maxwell's electromagnetic theory, provided the tools to understand the phenomena they observed.

However, there were some exceptional cases. One was related to solar eclipses, when the moon comes between the Sun and the Earth, covering the Sun's disc.

Astronomers had noticed that during solar eclipses, they could see stars that appeared near the rim of the Sun that they knew were behind the Sun and shouldn't have been visible at all. Somehow, the starlight was being bent as it passed by the Sun. Newtonian physics offered no explanation.

Albert Einstein suggested that the space near the Sun might be curved and so the light beam might simply be following the "straight" lines in this curved space. In 1916, his paper, "Field Equations of Gravity," proposed to replace Newton's concept of a gravitational force with that of a curved universe of four dimensions, adding time to our three-dimensional world. This world view is called the theory of general relativity, which reduces to the earlier Newtonian model when the masses are small compared to that of the Sun.

The field equations are quite complex mathematically, and the first solution was not found for about a year. The availability of additional solutions facilitated the application to the above issue in astronomy. The solar eclipse of 1919 provided data that confirmed the accuracy of the calculated bending of the light beam, based on Einstein's model.

More complicated versions of this bending of light are now called "gravitational lensing." Gravitational lensing occurs when a massive celestial body — such as a galaxy cluster — causes a sufficient curvature of spacetime for the path of light around it to be visibly bent, as if by a lens. The result of such space warping can be a distortion of the image of the remote object. But the effect of such lensing can also be to magnify the image of a distant galaxy. The Hubble Space Telescope has used such magnification to study galaxies that would otherwise be too faint to be seen.

Two recent events have further validated Einstein's theory of general relativity. One was the detection of gravitational waves in 2015. Gravitational waves are ripples in spacetime. When large objects move, the curvature of nearby spacetime changes and these changes move outwards (like ripples on a pond) as gravitational waves. A gravitational wave is a stretch and squash of space and so can be detected by measuring the change in the distance between two objects.

The first confirmation of Einstein's prediction of gravitational waves came in 1974. Two astronomers were studying a pair of neutron stars that orbited each other. They noticed that the time it took for the stars to orbit each other was decreasing, precisely as Einstein's general relativity theory predicted, assuming that the stars were losing energy by creating gravitational waves. For this, they won the Nobel Prize in physics.

The actual detection of such waves would require another 40 years. The Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO) was the first instrument to successfully measure a gravitational wave. LIGO has two sites, one in the state of Louisiana, and the other in the state of Washington. Each site consists of a pair of orthogonal arms that are 4 Km. long. A sensitive laser ruler measures the distance between mirrors at the end of each arm. Now gravitational waves change the distance between the mirrors a small amount. Thus, care had to be taken to eliminate or control any other factor that could affect the distance between the mirrors. Special equipment was developed to control the temperature, to eliminate any vibration, and to stabilize the electronic circuitry. A new concept in interferometry was also introduced.

On September 14, 2015, gravitational waves were detected and traced to the merger of two black holes about 1.3 billion light years ago, somewhere in the southern hemisphere. Since then, LIGO has detected an additional 90 gravitational waves. Most of these are due to mergers of black holes, but also include the merger of two neutron stars and the merger of a neutron star and a black hole.

The second confirmation of the theory of general relativity was the direct visual proof that black holes really do exist. (This was described in an earlier issue of *News and Views*.) Despite these proofs, some questions about general relativity still exist. While the original field equations have been modified to include electromagnetic phenomena, the inclusion of quantum field theory appears to be more challenging. The problems called dark matter and dark energy also remain to be solved.

FOCUS FEATURE: AVILA'S FINE STAFF

"Maintenance Staff member saved our vacation. We all know that we have an excellent maintenance staff, but one member recently saved our cruise vacation. To board the recent cruise, Ellen needed a copy of her birth certificate, but we were in Miami! "Z" worked with Ellen's brother to send a digital copy of the certificate in time for us to board the ship.

"Z" we are grateful that you came to our rescue!!

Tom and Ellen Fitzgerald

"A tribute to our wonderful maintenance staff. Two weeks ago, we were very independent and need little or no assistance with the little things. Then life changed suddenly and we needed all kinds of help on "the little things" such as bringing in the big plant off the patio.... no problem. Putting the car in the garage.... no problem. Putting a little table back together.... no problem. All this assistance reminded us why we are so delighted to live here at Avila. Thank you! Thank you!"

Pat and Hank Binzer

"Recently, when I was ill with COVID and another health problem, I called Erich to see if he could pick up my medications. He sent one of his drivers to the pharmacy to pick up the prescription. When they brought it back, they put it on the table outside my door and then phoned me to let me know it was there. This way there was no physical contact with me, so my COVID would not spread. Since there was some difficulty in getting the prescription for my other problem, they did the same thing the next day. I want to thank Erich, his drivers and Isabella for making all of this go smoothly.

Also, during my quarantine Sharon at the front desk at the Lodge was extremely helpful in leaving off take-out order forms and packages.

Kudos to Sean, who has been the only server on several busy Saturday nights at the Lodge. He has served tables both inside the dining room and out on the patio, all by himself. He quietly and proficiently manages to keep all the diners happy."

Lynn Altonin



Panda Mating Fails; Veterinarian Takes Over

Juvenile Court To Try Shooting Defendant

Typhoon Rips Through Cemetery; Hundreds Dead

WHAT IS IT ABOUT FOOTBALL

By Patricia J. Binzer

*Crowds filling stadiums with bright young faces
Dressed in school colors each take their places.
Now look again who is waiting to cheer
Some are alumni who come year after year.*

*The band crosses the field taking long strides
Playing and marching, players wait just inside.
The flag is raised and all stand at attention
For the national anthem, I should mention.*

*Now comes a roar players charge on the field
Real big and strong, what power they wield.
Cheerleaders scream and rev up the crowd
You can hardly hear anything; it is so loud.*

*Two teams line up facing in a row
Time to get started; put on the show.
Tackle one here. Knock one down there
Crashing of helmets is heard everywhere.*

*Then they do it again Get back in line
Starting to move throw the ball just in time
A long throw to a player waiting down field
Close to the end zone, a first down it did yield.*

*Now you're excited. You're standing and yelling.
Who'll win the game there's really no telling.
But your team has a chance; that's what counts
Crowds worked up to a frenzy tension mounts.*

*And so it goes on a long afternoon.
Some of us are hoping it will end soon.
Enough screaming and banging of heads.
Players' concussions, that's what one dreads.*

*We know we may miss something
If we don't have team spirit to share
You go ahead, Yell! We won't care*

*It's on tee shirts and sweatshirts a famous name
Of a top ten team who may win the game.
It's Duke. No Penn State against Notre Dame
Your alma mater looking for fame.*

*You go ahead and wear shirts with pride
Loyalty is important. Cheer for your side.
The playoffs come and its championship time
I may be asleep. And that is just fine.*

HAPPY



THANKSGIVING

