

# Avila News and Views

*A publication of the Resident Council at Avila Retirement Community*

*Albany, NY*

*May 2024*

## AVILA WINS THE BEST IN CAPITAL REGION AWARD

By Tom and Ellen Fitzgerald

Embarking on a long one-month voting period, Avila residents were encouraged at the start to vote often by Lynn Altonin and John Wagner (pictured below).

On April 25th, the news reached CEO Kathleen Richards and Marketing Director Michelle Urban that Avila Retirement Community had been voted the #1 retirement community in the Capital Region through the Times Union competition. Kathleen and Michelle are pictured on the day of the announcement.

Residents were very pleased to hear that their home at Avila received the recognition it deserves. They expressed their feeling that this is a well-deserved award.



*Photo by Ellen and Tom Fitzgerald*



*Photo by Ellen and Tom Fitzgerald*

## FROM THE EDITORS' DESK

For the past three years, Avila residents have been able to welcome spring by strolling out to the patio of the main building and looking at the beautiful tulips planted by Tom Wahl. Each year the glorious, multi-colored display lightens our spirits after a dreary winter. Thank you, Tom.



*Photo courtesy of Avila Administration*

## MEET OUR NEW NEIGHBOR . . .

### GRACE LOMANTO

By Rose Ann Schaeffing



*Photo by Ellen and Tom Fitzgerald*

Our newest third floor West resident is Grace Lomanto. She is a wonderful addition to our Avila community. Interviewing her was a delight and she was very gracious to share her many life experiences during our rambling conversation.

She was born in Johnstown, New York but spent most of her young life in the Gloversville area where her Mother and Father worked in the leather industry as cutters and sewers. She still marvels at and appreciates how her parents were able to provide higher education on these working- class wages for both her (Education College of Potsdam) and her brother, who is a doctor.

In 1958 she married her wonderful Angelo, and they remained married for 66 years. While he went to law school in Albany, she taught at West Albany Elementary School. In the summers they went back to Gloversville to work at Angelo's family fruit and vegetable stands. After her husband finished law school, they settled in the Gloversville area where Angelo practiced law and later

became a judge. He and Grace had six children, three girls and three boys. Sadly, their youngest son died of cancer at the age of 22 while he was a student and football player at Vanderbilt. Another son died of cancer at the age of 51. Their remaining son and their daughters all live nearby in New York and Massachusetts.

While raising their children, Grace kept busy with a variety of volunteer work. When the local superintendent of schools asked her to come back to teaching, she was hesitant. However, she suggested to him she would take the kindergarten position if she could teach half day and someone else would be hired for the afternoon. This was a novel idea for the superintendent, but he did agree to make that possible. This allowed Grace to take care of home and family and continue with her volunteer work while also teaching.

Never one to be idle and always with lots of energy, when she was no longer teaching, she and a friend established a craft store. They had the store for 17 years and along with the store Grace taught craft classes—knitting, crocheting, etc. "All the work of God's fingers," Grace says. She also hosted a radio talk show about crafts.

When the children were young, the Lomantos spent vacations at Cape Cod but later the couple travelled extensively, including 17 times to their ancestral Italy. Grace ended her travels by touring Indonesia, Bali and Thailand with Linda Grace, one of her ten grandchildren. She made this trip right before moving to Avila.

Spend some time with Grace and enjoy her humor and "joie de vivre." Welcome Grace!

## ... AND CATCH UP WITH SOME OF OUR EARLIER- RESIDENTS

### MYRA BRICKMAN

Interviewed by Pat Binzer



*Photo by Pat Binzer*

A lifetime story about Myra cannot be told without including Louis. As their story unfolds it sounds almost like an arranged marriage. One night in the mid-50s in Philadelphia, Louis went to pick up his mother where some friends were gathering. As he was leaving, one of the women hollered to him, "Hey, Louis, have I got a girl for you!" That girl, of course, was Myra. He didn't call her right away, but when he did, they talked for a very long time. Then they met and were married seven months later.

After they finished their coursework at Temple University, Louis went on to the University of Pennsylvania for his PhD in mathematics, and Myra started her career as a teacher. After three years, they left Philadelphia, Louis with a PhD and Myra with their first child, Susan. Over the next several years, Louis pursued academic careers at Yale, Cornell, Indiana University, and eventually became a full

professor at Albany State, where he stayed for the remainder of his career. Myra went on to have two more children, David and Judy.

Susan lives in Virginia and is retired, David was principal second violin of the Rochester symphony, and is now an entrepreneur, and an owner of a float center. Judy is an office manager and a professional photographer. There are six grandchildren, and in January, a great granddaughter was born.

Myra and Louis were avid bridge players and frequently Louis partnered with Dick Clark. While Avila was under construction, Dick talked about it to Louis and said that they had signed an agreement to move in. Louis and Myra began to give the idea serious thought. They liked the idea of not being burdened with a big house, the maintenance, the lawn care. When they visited Avila, the salespeople told them that a waiting list for apartments was already developing. They made the decision to take the big step: on December 1, 2004, they moved into their brand-new apartment number 409E. Myra feels the move was just right to meet their needs, even as their needs changed over time. She enjoys her large sunny apartment, the friendly and very caring people, and the many programs.

During the 19 years that Myra has lived here at Avila, she has seen many CEOs, receptionists, maintenance people, food servers and food services, housekeepers, etc. The two constants have been Barbara Howansky at the fitness center, and Jeannie Martin in the beauty salon. Myra enjoys the services of both.

Lou passed away on December 2, 2023, almost exactly 19 years after they moved in. Myra has been fortunate to have the love and assistance of her children during the last many months. Judy even brought a semiprofessional decorator in to make suggestions to give a fresh look to the apartment, simply by moving things around and buying a few new decorative items.

Myra wants to thank the Avila community for their caring and compassion during this difficult time.

## PAT FREY

By Tom and Ellen Fitzgerald



*Photo by Ellen and Tom Fitzgerald*

Did you know that a dedicated tennis fan lives in our midst? She was an active member of the US Senior Tennis Association and has attended the US, French, and Australian Open Tournaments and Wimbledon. In fact, Pat Frey's love of travel often coincided with her eagerness to witness these prestigious tournaments in person. She recalls some of her favorite trips were to Australia and New Zealand, England and Ireland, France, and Hawaii.

Pat is a lifelong Albanian who attended Our Lady of Angels Grammar School and later graduated from Vincentian Institute in 1952. She remembers with a smile that Sister Edmund at VI was instrumental in helping her land her first job in the customer service department at Niagara Mohawk Power Co. In 1956, she left that job to focus on raising her family. Her daughter Karen was followed by her sons Neil and Jeffrey. When she felt ready to return to the workplace, she joined the NY Telephone Company, NYNEX, where she worked until

retirement.

When asked about her decision to move to Avila, Pat said she would move to a retirement community when she reached 75. She wanted to remain independent and relieve her children of anxiety about her well-being and happiness. She has been an active participant in and contributor to our Avila family. She particularly enjoys the pool with Aqua Motion classes, runs the weekly bingo games with her friend Joan Buttlings, and helps organize the weekly Catholic Mass each Sunday. In addition, she indulges in her lifelong love of opera through trips to the Met, Glimmerglass, and Saratoga Opera, as well as her membership in the Siena Opera Club. And, by the way, she still has a beloved tennis racquet in her apartment.

Pat has been an asset to Avila since November 2009 and is a fantastic source of information about Avila throughout the years! What she loves most is the beautiful diversity of our residents—their personalities, life experiences, and interests.

We couldn't agree more.

## SUZANNE HANSON

By Rose Ann Schaeffing

Sue is a proud life-long resident of the Albany area. She was born in Albany and lived there until she and her husband moved to Rotterdam. In their 51 years of marriage, they raised five children, three boys and two girls. One of the boys is deceased and the other four are spread from Korea to Texas to Ohio to Schenectady.

After her husband died in 2004, Sue sold their long-time, beloved family home and moved to her lovely cottage here at Avila. She chose to live here because she had friends living here. As the Avila community has continued to grow during her 18 years here, she feels the community has continued to be welcoming and friendly to all. It is the people and the community they form that Sue treasures and makes her so comfortable here.





*Photo courtesy of Avila Administration*

Sue was a child of the Depression and was not able to attend college. However, as she cared for her family, she kept up skills that would be helpful for employment. She would often turn on the radio so she could practice her shorthand and she went to night school to learn computer skills. These efforts enabled her to pass a civil service exam and when her youngest two children were in high school, she started working for the Schenectady County government. She was employed there for many years.

Coming to Avila has not slowed Sue down. She continues to be active in her home parish, St Madeleine Sophie in Guilderland, where she has been a member for 70 years. During those 70 years she was active in many groups, and she was very active in the process of building the school and a new church. She proudly reports that the school continues to be successful, and the parish is stable. She worships there regularly and

maintains a close relationship with parishioners. Sue also volunteers two times a week at the food pantry and soup kitchen at St John's/St Ann's.

To spend time with Sue is to know a person who enjoys people and continues to live a full life in retirement. She is an excellent example of all that is Avila.

## GLORIA KRIMMER, Interviewed by Wilbur Shapiro

Gloria and her husband Sanford joined the Avila community in 2007. Gloria recalled that immediately upon viewing cottage 31, she was convinced it would be the perfect fit for both of them. At that time, Gloria was still working as a real estate broker for Howard Hanna. Sanford had retired a few years earlier after running his own dental practice for 50 years. They both remained active, playing tennis and golf whenever possible at Shaker Ridge. Gloria and Sanford were married in 1955 and celebrated 68 years together.

Gloria attended the University of Vermont and Russell Sage College, earning a degree in English studies in preparation to becoming a teacher. However, as life would have it, she remained home raising her children and never entered the teaching profession.

Gloria and Sanford had three children. Sharon is an occupational therapist and currently practices in New York City. Cindy, following in her Mom's footsteps, is a real estate broker for Howard Hanna and was Gloria's partner during her 10-year career in real estate. Mark recently retired from NYS after working for 25 years as an accountant for the Thruway Department.

In addition to her children, Gloria now has five grandchildren and four great grandchildren who are the love of her life.

Throughout the years, Gloria has volunteered for various organizations including the Make-a-Wish Foundation and the American Cancer Society. She also enjoyed organizing several fund raisers that involved golf tournaments, as that sport was a lifelong passion of hers.

Gloria has an engaging personality and is a fine representative of the Avila community.



*Photo by Wilbur Shapiro*

## ELEANOR MILLER

By John Wagner



*Photo by John Wagner*

Eleanor was one of the first people to move into the Lodge at Avila, when it opened some 13 years ago. She has been quite pleased with the choice of a retirement community and her new neighbors on the Lodge garden club, Mary Farley, Janet Hudecek, Mark Jordan, and Julia Cadbury.

Eleanor Feehan grew up in Albany with her older brother. She went to high school at Vincentian Institute and then went to the Mildred Elly business school. Eleanor later continued her education at night, earning a Bachelor's and master's degrees in English and her teaching certificate at Russell Sage and Albany SUNY. When the children were older, Eleanor went to work at SUNY in Albany where she started as a clerk and retired as an executive secretary. She never actually used the teaching certificate, but her English skills are often on display during the Wordle games at the Lodge Breakfast Club.

While in business school, Eleanor married William ("Bill") Miller and they began to create their wonderful family with six children: five boys and one girl. Summer vacations were often spent on camping trips to a great campground near Narraganset Bay in Rhode Island. Later the family purchased a lot in the area, and they built a camping cottage. Over the years, the cottage has been expanded and it is now a second home which the family still enjoys.

Bill worked for the New York Telephone Company and was in his early forties when he died of cancer. The oldest child was then only 18, so Eleanor faced a significant challenge in raising teen aged boys. But it seemed that Eleanor is one of those special women. Barely 5 foot tall in their stocking feet, but psychologically, they are 6'2" tall. They can control young men with a frown and a raised eyebrow. Eleanor's children have done Mom proud. Other than the boy who died, the other five have gotten a college education and have blessed Eleanor with five grandchildren and four great grandchildren.

Over the years, Eleanor's recreation has changed. When the children were young, garage sales were entertaining, and Eleanor became quite knowledgeable about antiques. When the children were grown, she enjoyed traveling with SUNY colleges and has visited Europe (Ireland, Scotland, and Italy) many times as well as the islands of the Caribbean.

Eleanor believes that her greatest achievement was raising six children as a single parent. If you need validation, there are five adults with whom you can check.

## FATHER LEO O'BRIEN

By Tom and Ellen Fitzgerald

Eleven of the original Avila residents constitute a unique presence here. More recent residents, like ourselves, continue to learn from them and admire their joy in life. One of those "senior residents" is Fr. Leo O'Brien, who can be seen scooting around the halls on his daily business. Fr. O'Brien has had a wide and fascinating background and experience before and after joining the Avila community.



*Photo by Ellen and Tom Fitzgerald*

After ordination, he ministered to the St. Paul's Parish community in Schenectady for eight years before being assigned to St. Vincent's Parish in Albany for 34 years, many of those as their pastor. In 1972, he was appointed Vicar General for the Albany Catholic Diocese by the bishop. This role often required him to serve in the bishop's absence when he was unavailable because of scheduling conflicts. Fr. O'Brien identified three main priorities for leading his parish: to develop faith by ensuring good worship, good preaching, and encouraging social justice, ecumenical understanding, and acceptance of diversity.

Father moved to Avila in June 2005 and has witnessed many changes in the community. He noted that the first residents retired earlier and were, therefore, younger, had fewer walkers and mobility aids, and even attended the Wine and Cheese sessions standing up rather than seated. He commented that it is so important for residents to maintain a social circle, continue learning, and emphasize having a daily purpose in life. He relishes the

opportunity to study Hebrew and regularly keeps a puzzle at hand to keep his mind sharp.

Avila management asked Fr. O'Brien to assume the role of chaplain in 2006. He sets out to be present to every resident, to help residents appreciate different faith traditions, whether active or inactive, in the exercise of religion, and to make himself available to new and old residents wishing to discuss stressful issues or share personal stories. He is an active member of the Spirituality Committee that welcomes all residents regardless of formal affiliation. As a chaplain, he organizes the Anointing Service, Interfaith Meetings, and Pray for Christian Unity Week. Fr. makes a point to learn everyone's name and can often be found sitting at the library's newspaper table to greet people passing through to the Bistro.

Fr. O'Brien observes that change is difficult for many of us as we age. Many read and emphasize the positive aspects of social interaction and participation in the Avila community's many events, exercise programs, and supportive services. He still prioritizes listening to one another, exercising patience, coming up with positive solutions, and using the facilities offered here to help residents grow and learn. He advises everyone to stay involved in whatever ways they can. During our interview, he said he could see his mother living here because we are good people who are concerned about world peace and the injustices we read about daily.

It was a pleasure sitting with this gentleman and hearing his experience and zest for life. Thank you, Fr. Leo O'Brien. We are proud to live with you in our community.

## INTERGENERATIONAL INTERACTION: SHAKER WRITING PROJECT

By Tom and Ellen Fitzgerald

The Shaker Project, currently in its sixth year of linking selected Honor students at Shaker High School with residents of Avila, has blossomed into a beautiful vehicle for intergenerational interactions across generations. Dr. Bell, an English teacher at Shaker, initially proposed this project to enhance the communication skills of his students through letter writing with a group of adults in a unique way. Avila residents view this project as a valuable resource that provides a way to understand today's youth, their goals, aspirations, and fears in a personal and sustained format.



Dennis Murphy, one of the 28 Avila "pen pals," commented, "At first, I thought I would not have much to say to interest my student. That quickly changed when I mentioned that I grew up in NYC. Kevin, my pen pal, wanted more information about my experiences since he grew up Upstate. In visiting Boston, he was fascinated by the selection of foods, and I had the chance to describe the many ethnic foods available in New York City, the "big city."

Clairese Russell, another participant, explained the project's importance to her: "Reading about my pen pal's experiences in and out of the classroom keeps me up to date on our educational system as well as the interests of this generation." She continued, "My pen pal is not Christian, and learning about her customs gives me a better understanding of her beliefs. I purchased special stationery for our letters to make her feel even more important."

Dennis had the opportunity to guide his student. "I advised him to broaden his (career) horizons from computer science to engineering." Dennis ended one of his letters by advising his student to be sure to love what he will be doing, and success will come naturally.

A first-time Avila "pen pal," Elizabeth Hammer, summarized her experience and those of the other Avila residents when she observed, "It has proven to be all it was advertised as, and more. The stars were aligned the day my student and I were matched. We share so much—she and I have many overlapping interests, and her life at 16 is very reminiscent of my own at that age.

The Shaker Writing Project is a two-way success. Students have a vehicle to develop their communication skills, learn from the experiences of the elderly, and share what is important to them in writing, rather than digitally. Avila residents look forward to each of the four or five letters, hearing about their pen pal's current interests, goals, and values, as well as fielding their questions about the mysterious elderly retirement community named Avila. Elizabeth commented, "I had hoped for a way to connect with the younger generation and share a bit of my elder wisdom, and this has provided both. I look forward to letters arriving about every six weeks."

As this year draws to a close with our second luncheon hosted at Avila, you might consider participating in this rewarding experience next year, not only to share your valuable life experiences but also to witness the engaging insights and boundless energy of our teenage youth.

## DISCUSSION EVENT

By John Wagner

On February 22, the Avila Spirituality Committee sponsored a discussion event that considered two topics found in the book, *The Gift of Years: Growing Older Gracefully*. The forty attendees were divided into groups of five or six people. Led by Sr. Meg Canty and Maxine Koblenz, each group was asked to share their experiences with loneliness and their efforts with solitude, i.e., choosing to tune out the noise and bustle of daily life so as to listen to the quiet voice of the heart. The group discussions were stimulating and helpful. The committee is planning to offer additional discussion events later this year.



Photo by Rod Correll



## EARTH'S POPULATION STATISTICS IN PERSPECTIVE

Courtesy of Bob Cullon

The population of Earth is around 7.8 billion. For most people it is a significant figure. However, if you condensed 7.8 billion into 100 persons, and then into various percentage statistics, the resulting analysis is relatively much easier to comprehend.

Out of 100:

- 11 are in Europe
- 5 are in North America
- 9 are in South America
- 15 are in Africa, and
- 60 are in Asia
  - 49 live in the countryside
  - 51 live in cities
    - 75 have mobile phones
    - 25 do not
      - 30 have Internet access
      - 70 do not have the availability to go online
      - 83 can read
      - 17 are illiterate
      - 33 are Christians
      - 22 are Muslims
      - 14 are Hindus
      - 7 are Buddhists
      - 12 are other religions
      - 12 have no religious beliefs
      - 26 live less than 14 years
      - 66 die between 15-64 years of age
      - 8 are over 65 years old

If you have your own home, eat full meals and drink clean water, have a mobile phone, can surf the Internet and have gone to college, you are in the minuscule privileged lot (in the less than 7% category).

Amongst 100 people in the world, only 8 live or exceed the age of 65.

If you are over 65 years old, be content and grateful. Cherish life. Grasp the moment. If you did not leave this world before the age of 64, like the 92% who have gone before, you are already the blessed amongst humankind. Take good care of your health. Cherish every remaining moment.

## NEWS AND VIEWS 2024

(An Avila Resident Council Publication)

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## FOCUS FEATURE: AVILA'S FINE STAFF

*"We wish to thank Gordy Rifenburgh, Tom Thompson and Dimitri for their exceptional service during the late March snowstorm and power outage. Our generator had failed, and they arranged to transport us to the Main Building to stay the night in a guest suite. But when Niagara Mohawk restored power Dimitri returned us to our cottage and got us to safety through the snow and ice."*

*Susan Shipherd and Don Stauffer*

*"I sincerely thank Gordy, Dave, Dimitri, and any other staff who helped during the recent snowstorm. Avila took good care of us during the storm and the generator issues on Saturday, March 23, 2024. With my warmest thanks,"*

*Marge Gertzman.*

*"We thank the following employees for their outstanding service during the March weather emergency: Gordy Rifenburgh, Tom Thompson, Dave Ludwig, and Dimitri Perdaris. During the height of the storm, the staff worked wonders, transporting residents who had lost power to warm accommodations, ensuring our safety."*

*Larry and June Johnston*

*"I want to thank Maureen Unser, of the housekeeping staff. While doing the bi-weekly cleaning in my apartment, she noticed a stain on my comforter. Because I would need to use it that night, on Saturday she picked it up, washed it and returned it the same day. Many thanks to Maureen for her extra effort."*

*Lynn Altonin*

*"One evening, a few Avila residents recently attended a program at nearby SUNY. Erich drove the bus. After the program ended, we began walking in the rain towards the bus. All of a sudden, there was Erich, "my knight in shining armor." Erich helped me with the wheelchair and in a minute, I was back on the bus."*

*Gloria Herkowitz*

*"One afternoon recently when it was raining very hard, I looked out of our window and saw Devin taking our trash and recyclables out to empty them. When I saw him later, I commented that his clothes must still be wet. 'Well, I had to get that job done so I could get here to the front desk for my shift.' This made me think about all the men who make sure our trash and recyclables are emptied twice daily regardless of the weather. Thank you to all who do this job without waiting for warmth and sunshine. Wonderful service!"*

*Rose Ann Schaeffing*

## SINCE OUR LAST ISSUE . . .

*Commentary and photos by Tom and Ellen Fitzgerald*



The 12<sup>th</sup> annual spring concert by the 50-member Albany Area Senior Orchestra took place on April 9th, delighting those in attendance. Conductor Vince Bonafede expressed his delight in returning annually to Avila because of the residents' warm reception and the marvelous acoustics in the Great Room."

Avila residents admired and appreciated the information about the charitable mission work performed by two groups supported by Westminster Presbyterian Church. The session, sponsored by Lois Wilson, featured presentations by the Rev. Barbara Asempa and John and Lyn Kucij, who detailed the educational, medical, and water services organized by their organizations for the poor in Ghana and Liberia."



Is it a bird, is it a plane, no it's...the April eclipse at Avila. A large turnout of Avila residents can be seen viewing the afternoon full eclipse in comfortable seats from 2:30 to 3:30 PM in Avila's courtyard and the Lodge. The residents left this viewing with an expanded appreciation of this natural phenomena. "

Avila was in high fashion for the Kentucky Derby Day. Many of the residents displayed their finery but the three proud winners are pictured, from left to right, Margaret Hart, June Johnston, and Jeanne Bradt."



## *WHAT ARE YOU READING?*

*By Patricia J. Binzer*

*I see you carry a book  
wherever you go.  
Afraid you'll miss something  
if you're reading slow?*

*I see you in the courtyard  
enjoying the warmth of the sun  
still reading the book.  
The tale is not done.*

*The clouds start moving in  
casting shadows while you read  
You're missing the pleasure,  
not going to succeed.*

*You go inside.  
Find a quiet place to sit  
Near the elevators there's light  
That could be it.*

*You just settle in  
finding where you left off.  
There's someone near you  
who stifles a cough.*

*"What are you reading?"  
The question is asked  
I had to look up  
and deal with the task.*

*It's a really good book  
About things I don't know  
About an exciting event  
Revealed by words right below.*

*Reading is exciting.  
For me it's a way  
to learn something new  
every single day.*

*But what are you missing  
by not looking around?  
You're not enjoying  
Nature's sound.*

*The birds call to each other  
when they sing in the trees,  
bringing smiles to our faces,  
helps our hearts feel at ease.*

*The maples have leaves now  
the last time I looked.  
You may have missed that  
with your nose in the book.*

*The world is still out here.  
Life goes on every day  
People busy and doing  
with new things to say.*

*Lots of us read more  
a few years ago  
but now the print is so small  
the going so slow.*

*We rely on good movies  
or shows on TV  
And long conversations  
feel good to me.*

*Don't mean to disturb you  
Get back to your book.  
Show me the cover  
and I'll take a look.*

*Maybe I'll read it  
or watch for the show  
to tell the same story.  
Well, I've got to go.*