

Avila News and Views

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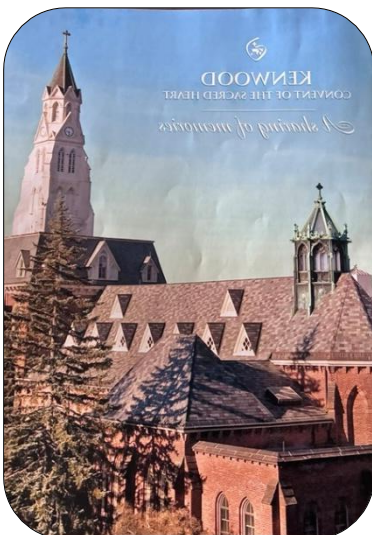
A GIFT TO AVILA: THE RELIGIOUS OF THE SACRED HEART (RSCJ), WORLDWIDE COMMUNITY

By Ellen Fitzgerald

The Religious of the Sacred Heart are members of an international organization of Catholic women founded in 1800 in Amiens, France, during the French Revolution by Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat. She was inspired to educate and train women as leaders to share their values wherever they might be called. Today the order claims 1,400 members serving in 43 countries throughout the world. Currently, there are nine nuns living at the Lodge at Avila and seventeen being cared for at Teresian House. They belong to the US-Canada Province of the Order. Regardless of where they presently live and minister, these sisters have dedicated themselves to living the charism expressed over 200 years ago by Madeleine Sophie to reveal God's love to the world through the ministry of education. Integral to that mission is a life of prayer and living in community where the unique gifts and strengths of each are discerned and shared for the benefit of all. The logo of the order shows the loving heart of Jesus embracing the world, the source of love to be shared through service to others. Today, the RSCJ minister not only in the myriad schools they founded, but in professions and careers like administration, law, medicine, art, writing, therapy, pastoral counseling, spiritual direction and social work. They work in universities, elementary and secondary schools, hospitals, shelters and prisons. They reach out to migrants, indigenous peoples, refugees, women and children, the sick and the searching. Today, particularly in Africa and Indonesia, their numbers and ministries are growing.



The Kenwood Years in Albany



Madeleine Sophie's vision for her young order was that it would develop a presence in the United States and by 1852 the Albany mission was founded first on North Pearl Street where several nuns lived and operated a school for 36 students. By 1859, the Society had outgrown a second larger space and settled on the purchase of the Kenwood property, a large home set on 53 acres south of Albany developed by Joel Rathbone who had named it Kenwood. In 1861, the school was incorporated as the Female Academy of the Sacred Heart in the State of New York. In 1866, a five-year construction program began on the site encompassing a convent for the sisters, a novitiate for young women discerning a call to religious life, a large chapel, an infirmary to care for the aging, and, of course, the Academy which accepted day students from local communities as well as boarding students primarily from Latin America. New construction in 1932 added a wing to the facility to accommodate the growing number of young women interested in being prepared to join the order. The Kenwood community

thrived for 150 years at its Albany location.

During the 1960's, however, the Second Vatican Council in Rome called upon the Church to re-examine the ways in which it interacted with the modern world. One significant effect for the Sisters was the end of a cloistered lifestyle. While the Society would continue its commitment to prayer and contemplation, it began to re-examine how to respond to needs beyond their convent walls.

A young Father Howard Hubbard working at St. John's inner city parish and at Hope House rehabilitation center asked the sisters to become part of an outreach effort in Albany's inner city. Six sisters moved into two apartments in the subsidized housing on Green Street to minister more effectively to the poor. Two other members of the order established the Abba House of Prayer which welcomed both Catholic and Episcopal faith traditions. Others served in city parishes by visiting the home bound. At Kenwood, major changes occurred as well. In 1975, to support the interfaith outreach between the Episcopalian and Catholic communities in Albany, Kenwood Academy and the Saint Agnes Episcopal School merged and became the Doane Stuart School. It remained at the Kenwood site until 2009 when it relocated to Rensselaer. Father Jim Kane, Director of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs for the Catholic Diocese emphasizes how significant the merger of faith traditions was by the creation of Doane Stuart and recalled the contributions of Sister Mary Gen Smyth and Sister Libby Hoyer who directed Abba House where many interfaith events were held over the years.

By 2002, more changes lay ahead. It was apparent that large numbers of the Society were aging and that Kenwood could no longer meet that need without help. After searching diligently for the right solution, the aging and infirm were welcomed by the Carmelite Sisters at Teresian House in 2004 where they continue their life of prayer and contemplation of the Heart of Jesus as their ministry to the world. They regularly gather in their own community room there.

Meanwhile, at Kenwood, after a careful reckoning of financial resources revealed the increasing burden of maintaining the property, the decision was made to put it up for sale. Ideally, the remaining Sisters who wished to stay in the area hoped to live close to Teresian House to continue their commitment to their retired members. A solution was found when they were offered the opportunity to design a living space at the smaller scale Lodge being constructed at Avila, a space that would allow them to live in community, continue their life of prayer as well as the ministries that they cherish. In 2010, six sisters moved to Avila.

The Lodge at Avila

Today, RSCJ come to retire at Avila as do we all. Some come to write books or finish one they may have put aside when they were more active. Others volunteer in the inner city or in educational organizations. They host many international visitors as their sisters in ministry travel among sites. Many residents see the sisters at Sunday Mass where they may sing in the choir the hymns that sister Meg so dutifully organizes for the congregation each week. Many of us also recall the years of service to the community by Sister Marie Buonato who served on the Resident Council and the White Pine Fund and who currently lives at Teresian House.

Thank you, Sisters, one and all. You are a special gift to this place we have chosen to share. May you be blessed as you bless us with your presence.

MEET OUR NEW NIEGHBORS . . .

NANCY AND STEPHEN CLARKE

By Tom and Ellen Fitzgerald

It was a pleasure to interview the Clarkes in the Meditation Room as they shared their stories of 60 years of marriage, a growing family of two children, three grandchildren, and one great-grandchild, two months old. Their daughter and son live locally with their families, one in Delmar and the other in Guilderland.

Nancy remembers their first morning, after a surprisingly quiet and peaceful night at Avila, asking, "Do you remember where we put the coffee?" Their story of why they selected Avila is a familiar one—everyone welcomed us, said hello in the halls, invited us to join them for dinner, and offered their help getting to know about the many features and activities at Avila. After living in Delmar for 53 years, they are familiar with the Capital District and can immediately engage in the social aspects, informational programs, and recreational activities associated with our communal living.



Photo by Tom and Ellen Fitzgerald

Stephen retired after 30 years of service following varied assignments in wildlife research and protection in Vermont, Massachusetts, and New York State, mainly in Olean and Delmar, NY. Nancy is proud of her 49 years as the organist at McKownville United Methodist Church on Western Avenue, as well as numerous volunteer opportunities. Among them she has enjoyed volunteering at Five Rivers Nature Preserve, NYS Museum, leading a course for special education students, and working at the State Education Department's Special Education Services. She joined the Department of Professional Licensing, where she worked with men and women whose professional training was in a foreign country and whose professional credentials could not be easily accessed.

Nancy is originally from Lancaster, PA, and Steve grew up in Manchester, MA. The couple met at the University of Maine, where both pursued studies in science. After a short courtship, they were married in December 1965. At that time, she had one more year to finish her degree, so Steve took a job in nearby Waterville, Maine, to wait for her to finish. At that time, he was issued a student ID from the University identifying him as a "student-husband," giving him free access to University events at no charge.

Both Nancy and Stephen are eager to begin a more active engagement in the activities offered by Avila. Stephen is interested in the monthly astronomy presentations and wondered whether other residents would be interested in forming a related special interest group. He is very knowledgeable about research and resources in wildlife biology. Nancy, as an avid reader, is eager to join the Book Club and perhaps investigate joining fellow quilters.

Near the close of our discussion, the Clarkes expressed their pleasure in joining such a welcoming community and look forward to meeting fellow residents soon. Join us in welcoming this warm and outgoing couple, who will clearly be a wonderful addition and will contribute to our positive culture here at Avila.

JIM GILBERT

By Tom and Ellen Fitzgerald

How far is Australia from Albany? Ask Jim Gilbert, a new resident, and he will tell you many miles, six medical institutions, and approximately 60 years. Coming from a family of limited means in Sydney, he realized at an early age that he had an interest in medicine and science, a strong mind, and a good memory. Using these gifts, he pursued and was awarded a highly competitive Commonwealth Scholarship, which he used to realize his dream of becoming a doctor. At that time, students, for whatever reason, were not encouraged in their medical studies and were bluntly told by professors that "two out of three of you will not be here to graduate."

" However, through persistence, talent, and a keen mind, Jim did graduate, and that was the beginning of his long and challenging career in medicine, culminating in his becoming an associate professor at the University of Texas in 2001.

For Jim, few things in life are simple and direct. After graduating in Sydney, he applied for a two-year internship in Auckland, New Zealand, at a well-regarded medical facility where he worked with doctors on the cutting edge of new technologies in hip and aortic valve replacement, as well as in an intensive care unit ranked among the best in the world.

There, he continued to learn a lot but was expected to work a 100-hour week with little or no overtime pay. After two years in New Zealand, he and his wife traveled to Jamaica to begin serving at the University of the West Indies, where he encountered many women experiencing blood loss following sexual assaults and illegal abortions. There, Jim and his wife, who worked as a nurse, received a \$40 per week income, which necessitated meals principally of salt cod and rum, which were plentiful and cheap! However, this job assignment did establish his love for reggae music.

Leaving this rural culture, Jim and his family traveled to Oxford, England, to assume a position in the department of anesthesiology at this 100-year-old institution. Jim continued his unconventional method to support his meager salary at this medical facility by playing cards for money with other employees. By now, his family had grown to three children (two sons and one daughter) when he moved to a rural hospital in Sweden while he waited for a green card to transfer to America. In Sweden, much of his medical practice focused on repairing broken bones resulting from falls downstairs following bouts of drinking, used by residents to ward off the effects of long, cold winters in that country. A few months later, Jim and his family were finally able to travel to the University of Texas, where he pursued his interest in research in the field of neuro-anesthesia. During his ten years of service at this University, Jim assumed a leadership role in their intensive care and invented new devices and procedures in anesthesiology. However, during this time, Jim and his wife divorced, prompting him to move East.

Coming to New York State, Jim took a job as director of anesthesiology at a hospital in Oneonta, where he remained for three years before formally retiring. After taking up residency in the Capital District, he had the good fortune 15 years ago to meet Ivy Green in an opera house in Hudson, NY. They discovered mutual interests in music, medical research, and "Bodyworks" which Ivy champions in her professional career. This relationship now supports Jim's efforts to deal with his Parkinson's disease, which challenges his physical and cognitive abilities, prompting him to leave his Albany apartment to join Avila this year. He visits Ivy each weekend in Saugerties, where she operates her Institute for Bodyworks, combining psychology, massage, and the teachings of Maria Rosen.

Jim expressed his hope that Avila will continue to help him address his Parkinson's disease. He is eager to share his numerous experiences in medicine, travel, and opera. When you have the opportunity and time, ask him to join you for a meal and listen to his fascinating catalog of travel and job experiences told in detail. Welcome, Jim, to Avila.



Photo by Tom and Ellen Fiitzgerald

SISTER HELEN MCCULLOCH

By Rose Ann Schaeffing



Photo by Rose Ann Schaeffing

Helen was born in Pittsfield, Massachusetts in the Berkshires. She attended the Convent of the Sacred Heart Kenwood in Albany. She went on to graduate from Maryville College in St. Louis and continued her studies at St. Louis University earning a degree in guidance and counseling. She considered religious life but her approach to this decision was "don't rush into anything you can put off." Delay she did—finally in 1979, Helen entered the Society of the Sacred Heart.

Her career has always centered on working with minorities and underserving youth. She worked in the St. Louis area in urban poverty programs before moving to Washinton DC. There she worked for 33 years at Archbishop Carroll High School, working with students on their journey to college placement. She always encouraged her students to choose schools that would challenge them to do their best. She wanted them to always excel and be able to compete even when they got outside their comfort zone. For some students this meant attending an HBCU (Historically Black College or University) but

for others it meant looking outside those schools at some of our best institutions. Her goal was always to help each student find the school that was the best fit for them.

Helen must certainly have been good at this at Carroll as she was there long enough to serve the grandchildren of some of her students. Seeing these students made her realize it might be time to retire. So, at age 80 she made that decision. Again, she had approached this decision with the thought of not rushing into anything she could put off.

In her free time, Helen has always enjoyed time with family and friends and swimming, going to estate sales and travelling. She is currently participating in the aqua motion programs here at Avila. As she settles in, she will be considering other ways to participate in our Avila community but, true to herself, she is not rushing into anything.

Welcome Helen, we're glad you decided to return to your area roots.

MICHELE SANTOLI

By Jane Hale

Can you imagine living for most of your life a mere 13 miles away from your future spouse but having to move over a thousand miles away before having the chance to meet that person? That's the tale of how Michele and Rudy Santoli finally got to meet after living so close to each other.

As a child, Michele Delia moved with her family from Brooklyn to Douglas Manor on Long Island. As much as she liked living on Long Island, she balked at the prospect of continuing to live at home and attend college locally, so she set her sights much farther away and off she went to Kansas State University. Coincidentally, at the same time, another Long Islander named Rudy Santoli also made the decision to venture from his home in Oceanside and head to Kansas State for his college years. And the rest, as they say, is history.

After graduation from Kansas State, the lure of Long Island brought them back east and for a short while after marrying, they lived in the town of Great Neck until Rudy's career brought them to the Albany area in 1970. After working for a while with the Avis Corporation, Rudy accepted an



Photo by Jane Hale

entry level position with Albany Med where he rose to the position of executive vice-president, a position he held until retirement.

The move to the Albany area also worked out well for Michele's career plans because she was able to continue her education at SUNY Albany where she earned her master's degree in reading, certifying her to teach elementary through high school. Her professional career in the area began with her teaching briefly in the Catholic Diocesan schools before moving on to the South Colonie Central School District where she taught for over 40 years.

After leaving Great Neck, Michele and Rudy made their first home in the Albany area in Loudonville where their two children, Alex and Darcie, were born. Alex is the father of Michele and Rudy's two grandsons who now live in Verona, NY and Tennessee and Darcie is the mother of their two granddaughters who are students at Quinnipiac University and the University of Delaware. After their 36 years in Loudonville, Michele and Rudy moved to Guilderland where they lived for another 20 plus years.

During their 59 years of marriage, Michele and Rudy did some extensive traveling throughout Europe and the Caribbean as well as into Alaska either as part of a land tour or on a cruise. For 10 years, they also did the snow-bird trek between Guilderland and Naples, FL escaping the harshness of the Albany area winters. It's understandable that one of the things Michele is looking forward to is not worrying about what the winter will bring. She knows that here at Avila, she can forget the snow shovel and finding someone to do the snow plowing.

For several years, Michele admits to being ready to make the move from home ownership to Avila, but Rudy was not ready for that kind of change. She felt the relaxed, warm and welcoming atmosphere of Avila would be a perfect fit for the kind of lifestyle that would be best at this stage of their lives. Unfortunately, it was also over these past few years that Rudy's health began to decline and sadly, he very recently passed away. That loss convinced Michele even more strongly that Avila would be the right place for her to be. Here she'd be able to pursue her interest in painting and participating in the games and puzzles she so enjoys, all without the concerns that come with home ownership. So, from all of us here at Avila, welcome Michele!

ROBERT THEIN

By Rose Ann Achaeffing



Photo by Rose Ann Schaeffing

Bob and his wife Wynette are originally from the Midwest. Bob is from Missouri and Wynette is from Kansas. They met when they were students at Washington University in St. Louis. After they married, they transferred to the University of Kansas to take advantage of state tuition rates. Bob earned a degree in electrical engineering and Wynette earned a degree in education.

After graduation, Bob received an ROTC commission as a second lieutenant in the army. After officers basic training he was sent to Missouri where he was to lead training for new inductees. When he arrived, there was no housing available on base so he and Wynette purchased a house trailer and parked it on base. His supervisors soon learned that he had a degree in electrical engineering, so he was reassigned to the construction and installation of the new electrical rifle ranges.

After the army, Bob went to work for Western Electric who had the contract with the Air Force to test the early warning system for our country. He learned IBM was responsible for computer development and General Electric and Westinghouse were responsible for the radar system. Western Electric was responsible for ensuring that all the systems worked together. This required some travel, so he and Wynette hooked their trailer to a '55 Chevy and travelled as needed.

Eventually they settled in the Baltimore area with Western Electric. Bob went on to AT&T and then to Bell Communications Research where he worked in computer software until his retirement in 1999. During these changes Bob and Wynette moved back and forth from Baltimore to New Jersey four times from 1964-1977.

The final move in this merry-go-round was to Bridgewater, New Jersey where they lived until 2008. Staying in one place was a welcome change as they had moved 20 times during their married life. When they rented their first home in the midst of all these moves, Bob said they joked (seriously) that the porch alone on the house was bigger than the trailer they had lived in!

During all the moving and working, Bob earned a master's degree in administration from George Washington University and did graduate work in computer software at John Hopkins. He was also an assistant Boy Scout leader for 25 years. During that time, he and his son's scout troop took up President Kennedy's challenge to walk 50 miles in one day. They had a well-planned itinerary and would start at 5:00 am and arrive at the 50-mile mark by 1:00 am. Bob led this annual hike for the scout district for 20 years. He once heard a young scout say, "I'm tired and want to stop but that old man keeps going so I can't stop."

When Bob was at the Philmont Scout Ranch in Arizona in 1979 preparing to lead a crew of scouts, the leaders were told to stop smoking, exercise and start running. He stopped smoking and began running at age 45. Since then, he has run the Boston and Philadelphia marathons as well as the New York marathon twice. His last marathon was a half marathon at the age of 82.

While Bob was working, scouting and running, Wynette was busy keeping up with all the moves and being sure their son and daughter were always where they were supposed to be! She valued her hobby and interest in quilting. She made quilts with church groups and clubs wherever they lived. She always hoped to open a quilt shop of her own, and with Bob's encouragement, she did so with a friend in 1983. They called it "The Contented Heart." This was successful, but she sold her share to the friend in 1983 when a bout with Lyme disease left her unable to stand for very long.

Bob and Wynette have always supported and worked with each other in their various endeavors and situations. Now Bob spends every afternoon and early evening with Wynette at Teresian House where she lives because of a stroke. They will be married 72 years on Christmas Eve. Why did they marry on Christmas Eve? This was at Wynette's insistence because all the important events leading to the marriage (first date, pinning, engagement) were on Fridays. When they were ready to marry, Christmas Eve fell on a Friday. It took a bit of discussion with a young minister to convince him to marry them on Christmas Eve. This interviewer suspects Wynette is already looking forward to their 73rd anniversary in 2027 when Christmas Eve again falls on a Friday. Welcome to our community, Bob and Wynette.

JANET WEBER

By Rose Ann Schaeffing

Janet was born in England and spent most of her early childhood there. Her father was from Switzerland, so she did spend a couple of her early years there. However, she was in England during WW II and recalls having to evacuate to the north during German air attacks. She particularly remembers hearing the "doodlebugs" (unmanned V-1 flying bombs).

The English called them "doodlebugs" because of the buzzing sound they made as they flew. When the sound stopped, the bombs would drop.

Janet was educated at the Royal Ballet School. Dance was her art. She earned a degree in education with emphasis on dance and drama. In her early career, alongside the regular subjects she taught dance infused with drama to both younger and high school students. She always emphasized the relationship between dance and acting, noting the interaction of the two is an important part of art.

After considering it for some time she became a Catholic at the age of 21. She felt called to religious life and she made the decision to join the Religious of the Sacred Heart. Her parents felt this was an odd choice for her given her background in dance and drama. They were not enamored of her choice but ultimately accepted that it was her decision to make. She was close to her father and feels that he always thought of his daughter as someone studying abroad rather than as a religious.

When she first emigrated from England, she went to Canada to work. She did study (as her father imagined) and earned degrees in the social sciences as well as training to become a spiritual director. When she had the opportunity to take a sabbatical, she chose to spend the time at a hermitage in Kentucky. This time of silence and contemplation helped her appreciate even more the interaction of art and spirituality. This was the foundation of her 30 years of work as a spiritual director and retreat giver at a Retreat Center in Madison, Connecticut.

When Covid arrived, Janet expanded her art into watercolor painting and, most recently, tissue art. She has many lovely and thought-provoking works in her apartment. Surrounded by this art while sharing her thoughts on art and spirituality was a time of calm and reflection. I encouraged her to share her work with us at the next resident art show. Welcome Janet, and we hope you will share your many talents with us.



Photo by Rose Ann Schaeffing

... LEARN ABOUT OUR STAFF MEMBERS

ESTHER FORD

Interviewed by Pat Binzer

Once a person agrees to be interviewed by me, I give them a list of several questions that might be asked to give them a heads up concerning what we will talk about. Esther filled in some answers in advance and was ready to share information.

Esther Ford, supervisor of housekeeping, has worked at Avila since 2011. She takes responsibility for her job very seriously. She aims to provide the housekeepers with the guidance and tools they need to be able to provide their services to the Avila residents. She welcomes feedback from the residents or questions they may have about housekeeping. The residents are what she likes best about working here.

No surprises in those statements. You already knew that about Esther. But did you know she was a charm school graduate? And a fashion model? Both are true facts. She was the youngest in a family of five boys and three girls. Esther wanted to hang out with her brothers and their sports. The sisters were really "girly girls." But not Esther. She claimed she was a tomboy.



Photo by Pat Binzer

Her mother had other plans, so her mother enrolled her in the Montgomery Ward Charm School, known as the Wendy Ward charm school for teenage girls. The classes met weekly to teach young women posture and etiquette and basic runway modeling, ending with a live fashion show. She learned how to walk with a book on her head, how to sit properly and gracefully but she still was a tomboy at heart interested in the same sports her brothers played.

After high school, Esther attended Cazenovia College for a year but missed her family and home life. She returned home to Albany and joined her mother as an employee of Key Bank for several years.

Every summer during her growing up years, her family vacationed at Belvedere Lake Resort in Cherry Valley. Time spent at Belvedere Lake was listed as her favorite vacation.

When asked about pets, Esther told this story about her current pet. A friend of the family was on his way to visit them on a cold night when he came across this tiny calico kitten wandering all alone. He picked it up and put it inside his coat to keep it warm and went on his way to her home. Of course, everyone fell in love with the tiny ball of fur. Esther had grown up with calico cats, so she immediately became attached to the kitten. The new arrival was named Aires and moved in as Esther's roommate.

When asked how she spends her free time, the answer was straight forward and simple, "I watch reality TV and drink beer." She lives with her daughter and two grandsons and her calico cat here in Albany.

GORDY RIFENBURG: AVILA'S FACILITIES MANAGER

By Tom and Ellen Fitzgerald

One of Avila's most familiar faces is that of Gordy, our long-term facilities manager. He joined our staff in 2014 following a career with a local Albany construction firm. During his almost 13 years here, Gordy has experienced considerable turnover not only among CEOs and maintenance staff but also, of course, among residents. Hence, one of his major responsibilities is remodeling and renovating apartments and cottages in preparation for new occupants. He feels this is one of the most demanding, time-sensitive, and rewarding parts of the job. Gordy strives to complete these renovations on time so that new residents can move into their new homes with happy smiles (even as they face the task of many unpacked boxes).

Gordy supervises four members of his maintenance staff and six part-time security staff. While much of the routine maintenance work at Avila is completed by his staff, subcontractors are hired for specific, large-scale repairs and improvements. One of his biggest challenges remains unexpected repairs, big item improvements, and the increasing cost and scheduling of capital improvements. Although we know that residents are encouraged to submit work orders for repairs, we may not know or appreciate that, on average, the maintenance staff prioritizes and addresses 190 to 250 work order requests each month, making it a daunting task. Residents frequently express their appreciation to Gordy and his team when their requests are handled promptly.



Photo by Tom and Ellen Fitzgerald

We asked Gordy how he responds to the numerous questions he is asked in the hallways and at Town Hall meetings. He modestly responded that he works hard to stay on top of the changing factors in construction and maintenance, such as costs, building techniques, and scheduling.

Sometimes he needs to research specific questions raised by residents. When asked about his biggest challenges, he quickly responded that they continue to be the turnover of residents, the rising cost of labor and maintenance materials, and the task of satisfying 250 residents with different personalities and expectations. However, he quickly added that he is happy in his job, satisfied with the people he works with, and optimistic about Avila's future as a premier retirement community. He also appreciates the expression of gratitude and thank-you notes he receives almost daily from residents and management.

Near the end of the interview, Gordy summarized his overall job responsibilities as problem-solving, helping people with their needs, and being sensitive to each resident's unique personality and problems. As facilities manager, he is allowed several weeks of vacation per year but usually takes only six to ten days to pursue his love of hunting with both handguns and bows and arrows, along with his six beloved dogs. Three years ago, he retired from home ownership in favor of an apartment outside of Troy. He added that apartment living gives him more time to do the things he enjoys and to "retire" his dogs.

With a broad smile, he reminisced about the numerous successes he and his staff have had over the past 13 years. He acknowledges that he needs to say a firm NO to some resident requests, such as adding an extension to their patios or installing new carpeting every two years. He also requests that, once residents request assistance, they do not cancel the visitation time at the last minute, as this creates scheduling problems. Yet, despite all the challenges and demands on his time, Gordy explained that he has no plans to leave Avila until his retirement in the distant future.

We are privileged to have Gordy as our facilities manager, given his experience, dedication, and sensitivity to the increasing cost and labor demands. Thank you, Gordy, and the maintenance staff, for all you do each day for us. You are a major part of the positive culture that exists here at Avila.

FEATURE FOCUS

"Residents expressed their appreciation for the newly installed hand railing at the front entrance of Avila. We thank Gordy, who suggested the railing, and his staff, who installed this safety feature, which is heartily appreciated by all residents."

Tom and Ellen Fitzgerald

"Tom T. is always ready to jump in and help without even being asked. When my electric scooter battery died, he pushed me home so I could plug it in. I didn't even ask! Thank you, Tom."

Lois Caulfield

"Our new maintenance employee, George Singletary, has made a great impression on me regarding his customer satisfaction approach. He let me know ahead of time when he was taking care of a work order request on the outside of my cottage, and then he called to tell me that it was completed. Thanks, George!"

Margie Faverman

NEW PROGRAMS AT THE AVILA FITNESS CENTER

By Jane Hale

Take a poll among any group of seniors about what they fear most and close to the top of any list will be the fear of falling. That fear can be strong enough to create enough anxiety to affect many everyday activities: dressing, bathing, showering, reaching for something on a closet shelf or even just plain walking or standing without assistance.

Ask a senior who has fallen how it happened and the answer will often be, "I lost my balance" or "I tripped" or "My leg just gave out." Certainly there are other causes for falling but in an effort to address trying to avoid falls caused by either the loss of balance and/or the loss of the flexibility needed to maintain safe body movements, Barbara Howansky has instituted two new programs at the Avila Fitness Center.

For those seniors wishing to work on their balance, MaryJane is conducting a half hour "Balance Class" on Wednesdays from 11:45 to 12:15. The exercises in this once-a-week class are simple enough to be practiced as often as desired because there's no equipment involved except for a chair. And since just about every hallway in Avila has a bar along the wall, there are definitely plenty of places to practice some of the balance techniques MaryJane will introduce while having the security of the bar right next to you. Imagine being able to make unexpected sideways movements or glances over your shoulder without that feeling of being a bit off kilter. That's where MaryJane's balance class can take you.

Gaining flexibility to move fluidly without fear of falling is one of the benefits of yoga but for many the idea of floor exercises is a bit daunting. However, on Tuesday mornings at 9:30, Laleh is conducting an "Introduction to Yoga" that will introduce the participants to some of the yoga movements while they're either seated on a chair or standing next to a chair they can hold on to for reassurance. In addition, participants will learn the breathing technique that yoga encourages and that may be helpful as a relaxation technique or possibly even helping to deal with shortness of breath.

In time, if these introduction classes inspire participants, there's always the option of moving up to either the full yoga program with Laleh at 10:00 AM on Tuesday that follows the introductory yoga class or to Mary Jane's "Full Body Stretch" class on Thursday at 9:00 AM that always includes a segment on balance as well as stretching.

These new programs are offered to all Avila residents without any registrations or sign-up requirements—just show up. Additionally, there are several programs available in the Fitness Center that combine balance and/or stretching with strength training. And since Avila is fortunate enough to have an indoor pool, there's also a water therapy program designed to provide low-impact workouts geared to building strength, improving cardiovascular endurance and enhancing balance. So many choices and all available to every resident.

QUALIFIED CHARITABLE DISTRIBUTION: AN EFFICIENT WAY TO DONATE DURING RETIREMENT

By Paul DiNicola

Are you at least 71½ years old? Are you required to make a minimum distribution (RMD) from your retirement savings? Do you support charities? Did you notice new items (Boxes 4c2 and 4c3) on your 2025 1040 federal tax form? Do you like paying less income tax and less Medicare Part B and Part D premiums? If your answer is yes to any of these questions, please continue to read this.

Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) is a tax efficient way to donate to charities. A QCD is a direct transfer of funds from your IRA custodian, payable to a qualified charity. To be eligible to use QCDs you first need to be in the age range that is required to withdraw money from your IRA (i.e., subject to an RMD). QCDs can be counted toward satisfying your RMDs for the year. Here are the basic advantages of donating using QCD's from IRA-custodian-to-charity versus doing a donor-to-charity:

- A QCD excludes the amount donated from taxable income; it is an "above-the-line" deduction. Direct donor-to-charity donations are included as part of Itemized Deductions; these are "below-the-line" deductions.
- "Above-the-line" deductions lower the Adjusted Gross Income. This reduces the negative impact to certain tax credits and deductions, including the amount of Social Security income subject to tax as well as the calculated Medicare premium income adjustment. Here is the current 2026 range of Medicare monthly premium adjustments applied to AGI thresholds:
 - Adjusted gross income ranging from \$109,000 to \$750,000 and above
 - Can increase Medicare Part-B by an additional \$74.00 to \$486.90
 - Can increase Medicare Part-D by an additional \$13.70 to \$91.00
- The most recent Federal income tax changes made significant increases to the standard deduction amounts. So, you don't need to claim itemized deductions to benefit from charitable donations!

Here are some specifics to get the most out of the QCD process:

1. Taxpayer needs to be 70½ and be the owner of a Traditional IRA.
2. Using QCDs, a donor can donate a portion of their RMD, the full amount, or an amount in excess of the RMD up to a maximum of \$111,000 annually per IRA owner. Married couples filing jointly can each donate using QCDs up to \$111,000 annually.
3. The charity must be a 501(3)(C). You are allowed to make QCDs to multiple charities.
4. The funds must be made payable directly from the IRA custodian to the charity. The funds cannot first go to the IRA owner and then be donated to the charity.
5. Although QCDs may allow many to take advantage of the higher standard deduction amounts of the Federal tax reforms that took effect in 2025, others can still use itemized deductions for excess deductible items (which do not include the QCD amounts).
6. For QCDs to count towards your RMD it must be done by the same annual December 31st deadline.
7. Also, QCDs are not taxed on your New York State income.

I hope this summary clarifies and highlights the advantages of using QCDs for your charitable giving. Unless you are a nerd like me that has a hobby of reading tax law, I would recommend that you contact an investment or tax professional to see if QCDs benefit you. I hope I didn't ruin your summer enjoyment by writing about those darn taxes.

Last words: pay all your taxes that are due, but don't give the government a tip!

WHAT'S NEW IN THE AVILA GARDEN WORLD

By Jane Hale

RAISED BED GARDENS

Once again, Avila residents are enjoying an oasis of color created by our own resident garden volunteers. A profusion of colorful annuals is brightening the central courtyard of the main building and this year, the residents at the Lodge have been treated to a totally redone planter adjacent to the outside patio. After cleaning out the overgrown perennials and weeds in the planter and amending the soil, three new perennials along with some annuals were planted in that formerly forlorn planter. Next year's plans call for increasing the number of perennials in the Lodge's planter to go along with its seasonal annuals.



Photo by Jane Hale

The planters behind the garages are weeded and tilled every spring by Maintenance making them ready for easy planting. Currently, there are 3 vegetable gardeners already harvesting fresh beans and who will soon be seeing cucumbers and tomatoes ready for harvesting.

There's still plenty of room in these beds for any resident who wants to stake out a claim for space next year. Since the beds are prepped in the spring for planting, all it takes is a small bit of effort to plant for fresh vegetables or even for some favorite summer flowers to brighten your home.

Speaking of summer flowers, have you noticed the profusion of beautiful pink flowers on a large plant in one of the flower beds at the main building? It turns out that when the volunteers were getting the beds ready for planting, a strange but very healthy-looking unknown plant was discovered. It looked too nice to be a weed, so Rose Ann Schaeffing and her group of garden volunteers left it and watched it grow into a magnificent plant called Musk Mallow whose seeds either blew into the garden or were deposited

there by a bird or some other woodland creature. It was definitely a planting done by Mother Nature but whoever or whatever brought it to Avila, that accident has turned out to be one of, if not the star of the show this year.

CONTAINER GARDENS + GREENHOUSE ROOM

It's hard to find an area anywhere at Avila that's not been given a fresh summer look by the giant flower-filled pots wherever you look. Tom Wahl now has 18 pots to care for—14 at the main building and 4 at the Lodge. If you look carefully, you'll recognize that some of the geraniums in the pots were those that were overwintered in the Greenhouse room at the main building. Fortunately,

Tom had taken on the job of caring for the Greenhouse, making sure that any creature infested, diseased or dying plant is removed before it can spread harm to any of the other plants in residence. Removing a sick plant will give the owner the opportunity to bring the troubled plant back home for more intense personal care. Although having one person taking care of all the pots and the Greenhouse is a daunting task, it does prevent the plants from falling victim to overwatering or disease which are often fatal to container grown plants.

In the fall, when Tom is bringing plants into the Greenhouse room for overwinter, he's also planting tulips around the perennials in the raised beds so that Avila residents are treated to early spring color which is always a treat after the greys of winter. Then, when the temperatures begin to warm up, Tom removes the tulip bulbs so that Rose Ann and her volunteers can bring in a new supply of annuals for the summer. Great teamwork!!!

HERB GARDEN

A decidedly little-known presence in the garden world of Avila is the existence of an herb garden in the courtyard of the main building. At the same time Rose Ann Schaeffing was putting together a group of volunteers to rejuvenate the courtyard's raised beds, Mary Lee had her eye on one of those beds as perfect for an herb garden once its overgrown perennials were removed. This has been an ongoing experiment over the years as Mary has tried many of the better-known herbs like rosemary, thyme and sage as well as a few lesser-known species like pineapple sage and lemon balm, both of which happen to produce flowers favored by bees, hummingbirds and butterflies. With a bit of planning, Mary is gravitating towards perennial herbs that are strong enough to survive our Albany winters and continue to look good for several years. And for those residents who enjoy using fresh herbs whenever possible, Mary has a ready supply of mint, lavender and chives, yours for picking. Think iced tea with fresh mint.

*AND THE CELEBRATIONS CONTINUED
ON AND ON AND ON*

By Patricia J. Binzer

*For months we've all been busy
There's been so much to do
Our country had a big birthday
and other celebrations too.*

*There were lectures about history
with tales that we were grand
that covered the 250 years
as we developed this great land.*

*We East coasters listened with pride
to all the parts that we played
to form our growing country.
The documents got displayed.*

*July the 4th was the really big day
with fireworks and tall ships
all on display.
Every small town and big town
was trimmed in red, white and blue.
Parades and plays to entertain us
to name just a few.*

*The soccer games exploded
everywhere playing east and west
with players from foreign countries
determining who was best.*

*People set up watch parties
in stadiums and bars with beers
so they could watch favorites every move
and fill the room with cheers.*

*There were pitches used
in several states
that attracted crowds
and charged high rates.*

*Next came all the county fairs
with animals to see and games to play.
The Ferris wheels and merry-go-rounds
gave us lots to do, we had all day.*

*Each county had its own carnival flair.
Showing off features for everyone there.*

*Some on-stage performers
had a novelty act
Others just sang, and that's a fact.*

*The smells from the popcorn
and fried food did abound.
Brought about hunger,
it had to be found.*

*Some friends went to operas
Some went to plays.
Others went to the Saratoga races
or off to ballets.*

*Fall is approaching.
Time to slow down closer to home.
We wait for leaf peeping season
Maybe then we will again roam.*