

Avila News and Views

A publication of the Resident Council at Avila Retirement Community

Albany, NY

November 2024

ERIN STACHEWICZ MEMBER OF THE AVILA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Interviewed by Pat Binzer



Photo by Pat Binzer

Erin is a member of our Avila board. She is familiar with Avila and was here many times watching it grow and develop into a thriving independent community. She even told herself she would like to live here when she was older. She was delighted when she was invited to join the Avila board recently and could become an active member in the sustainability of the Avila community.

Albany has always been her home. She was born in Brady Hospital; graduated from South Colonie Central High School and then earned a degree in business from Maria College. Deciding that business wasn't really the career path she wanted to take, she followed her positive life experiences with an aging population and completed a bachelor's degree in social work from the College of St. Rose.

Erin's parents were many years younger than their siblings, so her extended family members were more like grandparents than aunts and uncles. At one point she thought she would even like to own a nursing home but decided there were too many restrictions to operate it the way she envisioned.

To prepare for leadership positions in the aging field, she earned a degree from the Russell Sage Graduate School in Health Services Administration with a minor in gerontology. She has held several positions in Albany County health and aging fields and was recently promoted to the position of Albany County Commissioner of Social Services.

Erin lives and cares for her mother with many relatives close by. Although she has no children of her own, Erin says she has many nieces and nephews who provide her with a large active family. Recently she and a niece took a wood carving course and learned to make "comfort birds." When finished the birds are given to people to help provide comfort and relieve stress by rubbing their tails.

She enjoys being outside and taking walks. She also volunteers for various not-for-profits such as homeless shelters, and helps veterans' organizations, in honor of her father who was a veteran. Broadway shows at Proctors and Cap Rep are also favorites.

We are fortunate to have Erin and her expertise on our board.

MEET OUR NEW NEIGHBORS . . .

VIRGINIA MALIKI

Interviewed by Rose Ann Schaeffing

Virginia is a lifelong resident of New York. She was born in Amsterdam and she and her husband Ronald lived in several upstate counties. They both love the Adirondacks but when Ronald became ill, they moved to the Albany area to be near their two sons and their families. They have five granddaughters and one grandson.

Ronald had a long career with the New York State Thruway Authority. He began there as a toll taker and successfully rose through the ranks to become the Director of Communications of the Authority. In this position he travelled to many places in the United States giving lectures and workshops. Virginia enjoyed travelling with him and visiting many parts of our country.

When it became necessary for Virginia and her husband to move, their sons "found" Avila and she said they never looked at other places because Avila meets all her needs. She said everyone is very welcoming and friendly. She described Avila as having a relaxing atmosphere even as there are many opportunities for activities. She appreciates that there is no pressure to do more than one is comfortable with. Virginia especially appreciates the staff and all the help they have given her as she settled in. She is especially grateful for the transportation they provide so it is easy for her to visit Ronald at the Teresian House.

Virginia enjoys reading all kinds of literature: fiction, nonfiction, history, biographies and autobiographies. She said this keeps her learning new things which she feels is very important at every age. As we concluded our conversation, we reflected a bit on the process and challenges of aging that we all share. Certainly, having to leave our homes is a major challenge, as are unexpected illness and giving up the independence of being able to drive. Smaller changes like no longer being able to knit and crochet that Virginia enjoyed can be frustrating. However, Virginia is a wonderful example of travelling this path with grace and peace.

CARMINE & ROSE MIRANDA

By Ray & Erin Teichman

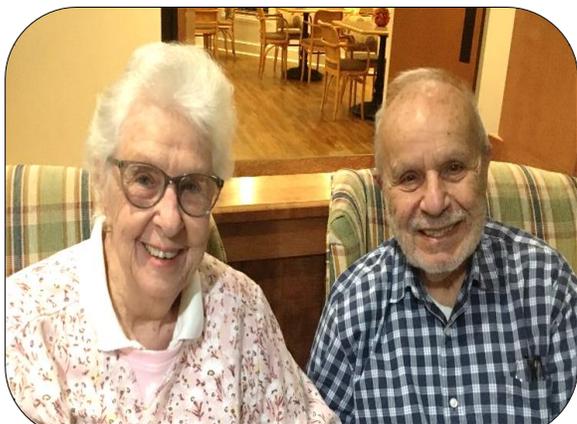


Photo by Ray and Erin Teichman

Carmine and Rose Miranda arrived at Avila on October 3 and are still getting settled and oriented. They first visited Avila just before COVID; but deferred moving here for a couple of years. Carmine was born and raised on Staten Island and Rose is from Long Island, though she was born in Mali Losinj, Croatia.

They have been married for 62 years and have two sons. Thomas, a mechanic, lives in Levittown, L.I., and David, a lawyer, in Voorheesville. Their family also includes two granddaughters and two grandsons.

Both Carmine and Rose are accountants. He graduated from Fordham University, and she is a graduate of Adelphi University. They met on the job, while working for the City of New York. They retired from

positions in Nassau County. After retirement, Carmine volunteered as an AARP tax preparer.

They are life-long travelers and have seen much of western Europe both on land tours as well as river cruises. Amsterdam and Ireland they found particularly enjoyable.

Carmine enjoyed playing golf, while Rose played tennis and paints. In moving from a house to an apartment, Rose has gone from large canvases to painting small decorative rocks.

We look forward to getting to know them better. Welcome to Avila!

RACHEL MATHIEU

Interviewed by Pat Binzer



Photo by Pat Binzer

At the beginning of the interview Rachel was asked how she was enjoying her new life here at Avila. Instead of answering my question, she gave the following response.

"I'm looking forward to learning more about the people who live here. I've never been in a place where there are 200 people with different histories who have adapted with such kindness and good cheer."

As the interview continued, I learned that she was born and grew up in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn; took the subway to work and to college, earning a BS degree from Fordham University.

Rachel paid her way through college working as a copy girl for the New York World Telegram & Sun. On the day she graduated from Fordham University, her first story was published in the newspaper, and she was also offered a full-time job. Before long, she advanced to be a full-time reporter, writing about places and events where the public could not go.

One of her major stories detailed the living conditions for inmates in the city prison system and the health problems they experienced living in such close quarters. She was invited to attend the opening of a new prison built for teenage boys, an event that featured Eleanor Roosevelt as a guest. Rachel was honored to have a memorable private lunch with the former first lady, who was the ambassador to the United Nations at that time.

In 1959, Rachel met and married Dick Mathieu, Albany legislative correspondent for the New York Daily News. Dick was a Korean War combat veteran who later worked in the NYS government, retiring as Director of Communications for the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.

At their home in Rockland County, Rachel and Dick appreciated and cultivated the beauty and importance of nature by planting trees, bushes and plants. Together they were deeply interested in enhancing an environment that contributes to air quality and protects wild birds.

In 1990, Rachel was diagnosed with breast cancer. After surgery and chemotherapy, she sought ways to help other women suffering from this disease. As a survivor with a background and interest in science, she was selected to serve as a consumer volunteer reviewer and then as a senior consumer volunteer reviewer for the Congressionally- directed Department of Defense Research program.

In 2001, the National Cancer Institute selected her to be a founding member of CARRA (Consumer Advocates in Research and Related Activities). She represented survivors at scientific reviews at National Cancer Institutes around the country, including Vermont, Buffalo, and San Diego, CA, and at meetings in Washington. DC

Rachel has one daughter living in Paris, and a younger daughter with a husband and two grown grandsons in Rockland County. Her son and daughter-in-law, who reside in Albany, are responsible for bringing her to live at Avila. Convincing her to sell the house she and her husband built was difficult after Dick's passing, but now Rachel is ready to explore her new life here at Avila.

FRAN AMEDIO, PROGRAM DIRECTOR

By Tom and Ellen Fitzgerald



Photo by Ellen and Tom Fitzgerald

Fran was gracious enough to sit with us only three weeks into her new position as Avila's Director of Programs. She is confident, enthusiastic, and eager to enhance the programs now offered to residents. When asked about her previous experience, she described twenty-plus years in real estate, event planning, and property management. Her multifaceted background will enhance Fran's grasp of what is needed to organize events, trips, and entertainment. She expressed her definition of success as residents happily participating.

Fran grew up in East Greenbush and Castleton and recently resided in Boston as part of her work experience in property management. She brings to her new assignment an enthusiastic openness for residents to send her emails, stop by her office, or drop her a note expressing ideas and suggestions for trips, music events, or dinners out that would appeal to them. Fran plans to work with the Program Committee to test ideas and enhance events that residents already enjoy. As she

said, she is here for the community and will talk to residents anytime or even have lunch when invited. Many residents had the opportunity to meet with Fran when she attended our wine and cheese get-together.

We are convinced that she is the right choice for our program director position because of her experience in event planning and the warm, enthusiastic personality accompanying it. She is a good fit for Avila and our expanding event offerings, keeping Avila a premier retirement community in the Capital District.

BRIAN ZAPPEL

By Rod Correll

Brian Zappel, an accomplished guitarist and singer, has been entertaining Avila residents for over 14 years, beginning with performances in the Great Room in 2010. In 2018 he transitioned to providing background music at wine and cheese on the first Thursday of each month. His performances at these gatherings provide a pleasant background, as attendees chat and get to know one another.

Brian comes from a musical family, a father who was a "fine singer," and two brothers who are musicians. Music has always been a part of Brian's life, at home and at work where he started by playing with bands before he went out on his own,



Photo by Rod Correll

formed his own company, Timeline Music, and started playing solo gigs.

Since the late 90s, his focus has been on entertaining older groups, such as ours. Brian's musical repertoire is expansive. His performances include contemporary hits, old time favorites, played in a variety of genres, sparked by clever hijinks, like strumming his guitar behind his back.

HOSPITALITY COMMITTEE

By Rod Correll



Photo by Rod Correll

For many of us, moving into a retirement community such as ours can be a daunting experience, a rite of passage we'd rather not make. Transitions are never easy, especially this one. Downsizing, leaving behind a house full of memories, saying goodbye to old friends can be traumatic. Since it came into being, Avila staff and residents have recognized the importance of social engagement, of making newcomers to our campus feel welcomed and at home in their new surroundings. Making that happen, by reaching out to people as they settle in, has been the hallmark of our culture here at Avila, an effort to build community, led by the Hospitality Committee.

Avila started taking shape in 2004, first the cottages, next the main building and in 2011, the Lodge. Just when the Hospitality Committee was formed is unclear but Joan Buttlung, a 15-year resident and former chair of this group, recalls that it was in full swing when she moved to Avila. Wooing prospects was a priority as its marketing director sought to achieve full occupancy. So was the need to make life at Avila an enriching experience for its residents. It was felt that positive reviews by residents, delivered face to face, were one of her best marketing tools and that residents could play major roles in helping inform, orient and engage folks that were moving in.

A protocol was developed for working with prospects. Committee members were assigned, one per prospect, to welcome, show and tell these people about Avila. Lest burnout occurred, efforts were made to spread out this workload so that no member felt overworked.

The same strategy was used for helping people moving to Avila. Each incoming resident was given someone to whom to turn, a mentor who would help answer their questions. Since getting oriented, acclimated, and engaged can take quite a while, no time limits were set for these relationships, many that often became fast friendships and remain intact long afterwards.

Another of the committee's initiatives was the community table, a celebratory dinner in the main dining room. This event, at which new residents were feted, was arranged by a member of the committee, most often by their mentor. Guests were chosen with an eye for people those being honored would enjoy meeting.

Erin Teichman and Clairese Russell, currently co-chairs, directed me to their predecessor, Gloria Herkowitz. Gloria filled in a bit more of the group's history, speaking highly of Bob Ford, its leader until he died, remarking how important it was someone like him at the helm.

Clairese and Erin have the same passion for seeing people oriented and connected. Their goals and game plan, one that has worked well in the past, will be an asset as Avila faces the challenges that lay ahead. It's good to know that we have an entity like the Hospitality Committee, working in concert with Michelle Urban, our current director of marketing. As our population ages, as fresh faces replace old ones, its members will be at work, helping keep our community engaged, vibrant and informed. If this type of work interests you, speak to Clairese or Erin. The more involved the merrier!

WHITE PINE FUND

By Erin Teichman



Photo by Lynn Altonin

Because Avila does not allow tipping employees, the White Pine Fund was formed in 2008 as a way for residents to show their monetary appreciation to staff at the Christmas holiday for the work they do throughout the year. Founding members were John Harrington, Carol Chandler and Erin Teichman. The current committee is comprised of Sr. Marie Buonato, June Johnston and Dennis Murphy.

Initially the committee was composed of three residents who served on a rotating basis, with one of the three being replaced by a new resident each year. Now the three may serve additional years. Their work usually begins at the end of October with a letter sent to residents giving the reason for the Fund and instructions on how to make

an anonymous donation. Each resident also receives a deposit slip and stamped envelope to a local bank. To guarantee anonymity, the bank, in its monthly statement, only gives the total deposit amount.

In early December, the committee meets again to disburse all the donations received. The amount of each check is determined by dividing the gross total of donations from residents by the total number of hours worked by all employees. They then handwrite a check to each Avila employee based on the total hours the employee worked during the prior year. The checks are distributed at the annual holiday luncheon for Avila employees.

The generosity of our residents has grown annually!

A final report, listing the total amount of donations and the hourly rate distributed to employees, is given to residents during the January Residents' Council meeting.

FR. JAMES KANE GIVEN AWARD

By Tom Fitzgerald

Avila residents are proud that the Capital Area Council of Churches recently honored Fr. James Kane, one of our fellow residents, with their Evelyn Stone Lifetime Achievement Award, recognizing his 42 years of work as the Diocese's director of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs. Congratulations to Fr. Kane on the well-deserved honor from all of us here at Avila.



Photo by Ellen and Tom Fitzgerald

SEEK AND FIND

By Rose Ann Schaeffing

Can you find these items/people at Avila?

- A blue kayak
- A couple of mischievous boys with sling shots
- Cows grazing in the pasture
- Workers carrying plate glass across the street
- A paint crew working outside
- A policeman stopping a motorist

If you found everything on this list, you have found Mike Short's model train display on 2 East near the elevators. It is a wonderful and interesting display. There are many other interesting things to see—a city area, a farm and some industry. Visit and explore it for yourself. There are switches with instructions so you can operate the trains. Mike says "Enjoy but please slow the trains down before you turn them off."

This is another example of the talents and hobbies our residents have and shows their generosity in sharing with all of us. Thanks, Mike.

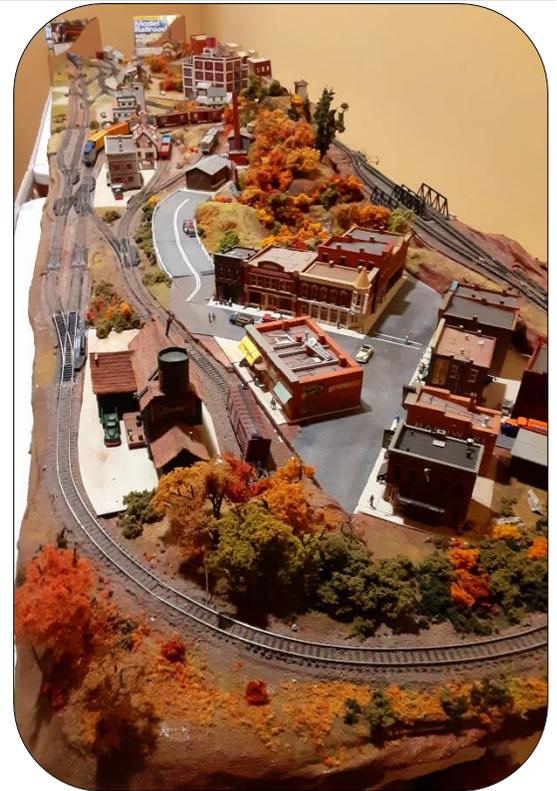


Photo by Ellen and Tom Fitzgerald

I WILL NEVER AGAIN VISIT MUSEUMS IN THE SAME WAY!

By Tom Fitzgerald

I have always loved visiting museums, but the prospect of spending hours walking quickly from one painting, sculpture, or display to another to see as much as possible was daunting. After two or three hours, I would walk out saying, "That was interesting but exhausting." Now, I realize that approach led to many unsatisfying experiences.

However, reading Patrick Bringley's book *All the Beauty in the World* radically changed my museum-viewing habits. Bringley, who worked for ten years at the Metropolitan Museum in New York City, emphasized the importance of in-depth viewing, reflecting on the artist's perspective, and analyzing smaller numbers of paintings.

The author opened my eyes to the wonder of spending time with a painting, asking what I am seeing and how the artist speaks to me today, even from centuries ago. Artists put their perceptions, skills, and feelings onto a canvas for us to discover. I may never "finish" rambling through great museums like the Met, but I will allow art and artists to share their healing power.

Do you plan a visit to large museums? Is your goal to "get through" all the galleries, see as much as your energy can bear, or open yourself to the message conveyed by individual works of art? In retirement, we have the luxury of choosing our daily course of action and how we allot our time. Why rush with a superficial view of art that has appealed to many people over the centuries? Instead, Bringley encourages us to select a small number of pieces and invest our time in discovering the wealth of information in each piece: the emotions depicted and the message that the piece evokes.

I am not giving up visiting museums! However, I plan to use my time in these beautiful buildings to my advantage and become more thoughtful, using the wisdom found in works of art. A tote bag offered for sale in the Met Museum store had a message for all of us: "You are no longer the same after experiencing art." Amen!

FOCUS FEATURE: AVILA'S FINE STAFF

"The Unidine hosts, Abra and Phil, who always greet residents with a gracious greeting and smile each time we arrive for lunch or dinner. Thank you both for making the mealtime enjoyable."

Tom Fitzgerald

"Avila's highly trained, punctual, courteous and very responsive maintenance staff improve the quality of life for Avila residents. Just a few examples:

- Tom K. was here this afternoon to remove and replace a broken bulb in a pole lamp that was more than 50 years old; he knew exactly what had to be done and did it quickly. (I just put in the work order about 2 pm today). I am also grateful to Tom for his talented assistance on prior occasions -- including years ago when he knew just where to place grab bars when I was coming back to Avila after I had a broken hip.*
- Richard was here this morning to show me how to correctly use the switch for the living room ceiling light. I no longer had light in the living room because of my error in turning the light switch. He is a good new addition to the maintenance staff.*
- Tom Thompson has been here far more times than I remember to help me with a significant number of issues related to my computer (saving me from having to hire an expensive outside technician) and other problems I had. For example, when I moved to Apartment 133, he recommended a \$10 light switch to turn on a switch I could not reach. In the last several years, I only remember one or two times when I had a problem, he told me I needed to hire a technician not employed by Avila.*

I have also appreciated Gordy's personal advice and recommendations after I transferred to a new apartment in July. Thanks so much to you and your entire staff."

Lois Wilson

"One of the newer maintenance staff members, Lavonne, continues the great tradition of our maintenance staff of helping residents when they have problems. Thank you, Lavonne for your help when my car would not start."

Tom Fitzgerald

FROM THE EDITOR:

Since I seem to have a mental block about her name, the following message should resolve everything.

"I just read the News and Views. I saw my name, but alas, the information was not correct. I am called Marjorie or Margie-never Marge!

Hats off to you and the other residents for a very nice newsletter!

Thanks in advance for a new correction!"

Marjorie (Margie) Gertzman, Cottage #16

SINCE OUR LAST ISSUE . . .



As always, Avila residents have been busy. Commentary and photos by Tom and Ellen Fitzgerald.

Michelle and Tracy's hard work marketing Avila resulted in a steady stream of potential residents visiting our home during our Open House on October 26th. As an example of Avila pride, over 42 residents volunteered their time to guide visitors on a tour of the facilities, while many other residents participated in pool, exercise, billiards, bridge and singing classes demonstrating the numerous activities available here. Avila pride at work!

After rigorous competition and applause from the audience to determine the winners, the costume finalists for 2024 are (left to right) Nina Larrabee (runner up), Fr. Jim Kane (1st), JoAnn Crinieri (3rd) and June and Larry Johnston (2nd)."



The 2024 Yard Sale, directed by Barbara Merritt, was successful again, generating over \$4,000 for the Alzheimer's Association. Pictured are some tireless workers highlighting available "treasures" for sale, from left to right: Laura Leeds, Ellen Fitzgerald, and Dennis Murphy. Everyone enjoyed shopping and cleaning out their apartments over the two days in October to benefit this worthy cause.



November 11th saw a large group of Avila residents gathered outside to sing our national anthem, observe the flag raising and recognize the 15-18 residents who honorably serviced this country. The outdoor activities moved inside for coffee and donuts and the singing of patriotic songs led by our own Used to Be Singers.



On November 14th, many residents attended the recognition of the 11 founding Avila residents in celebration of their 20 years at Avila. A plaque with each of their names will be on display, and each received a small silver commemorative ornament for use in their apartments. The names of the founding residents are Myra Brickman, Gloriana Clark, Mickey Fleishman, Sue Hanson, Rhoda Kratenstein, Nina Larabee, Janice Monty, Fr. Leo O'Brien, Delores Suozzo, Erin and Ray Teichman."

GIVING

By Larry Johnston

Looking for guidance? We all are. To conduct this search, we must be daring enough to look into our innermost thoughts. This involves objectively (hah!) evaluating our experiences. This storehouse of memories comes with attached emotions, ranging from sadness to exhilaration. However, there is always one trait that these recollections share. They are transient . . . they come and go. If we are lucky, however, we may discover that there is one category of memories that always delivers positive and lasting feelings . . . those that involved acts of giving. These recollections are so powerful that they make other experiences seem trivial.

Let's be honest. We spend a lot of our time worrying about our own welfare. In this mode, we may also feel twinges of guilt. It is disconcerting to realize that such self-centered activities may not provide the satisfaction and consistency that we anticipated. Oftentimes, it is easy to blame these disappointments on the fact that we are living in an increasingly complex and demanding world.

However, even on our worst days, when we engage in an act of giving, we derive a sense of worth. This giving could be as simple as an expression of concern for someone's welfare or an offer of assistance. At such times, we may have considered these acts of giving as merely normal behavior. Actually, they were heaven sent. Just name one of our everyday activities that has such extraordinary power. Simple, honest and potentially inspirational. For both the giver and the recipient.

One of the other interesting things about giving is the fact that, oftentimes, it is our own little secret. These anonymous happenings can be one of the most enticing attractions to giving. They are special opportunities to do something that is so praiseworthy without praise. The simplest giving can be a gesture, the grandest would be the sacrifice of one's life for the lives of others. In between, it can be anything from consoling others, offering a helping hand or teaching a lesson.

Give . . .it costs nothing yet is priceless.



- *The biggest lie I tell myself is . . . "I don't need to write that down. I'll remember it."*
- *I don't have gray hair. I have "wisdom highlights." I'm just very wise.*
- *I decided to change calling the bathroom the John and renamed it the Jim. I feel so much better saying I went to the Jim this morning.*
- *Last year I joined a support group for procrastinators. We haven't met yet.*

REMEMBERING THE ROLL-A-DEX

(And other out-of-date contact lists)

By Patricia J. Binzer

We all keep lists of who to call
when names need to be found.
But they do get out of date
And are of little use
and should no longer be around.

When was the last time
you scrolled through
names from long ago
On those saved old lists
Finding lots you don't remember
And others you don't even know.

Did you find some that surprised you
Perhaps a person you met by chance.
Maybe it was an old friend
you went with to a dance.

Did you take the time to savor
memories that came rushing back
Was there a smile, a happy feeling
As the recollection took you back.

Or did you find the names of some
who are no longer on this earth
Enjoy your feeling now
As you recall their worth.

Were there names of old friends
you always meant to call
Just to say "How are you.
I thought of you today, that's all."

So did you stop and place the call
Or send an email or a text
Or sit right down and write a note?
That would be the best.

There were names of former doctors, lawyers, a
plumber too.
Is it time to start deleting
names that mean nothing to you?

It may feel like you're erasing
part of your early days
But if they are really important
there are other ways

There's email, Facebook, and
iTunes too
And Facetime, texting just to name a few.

The end of the year is coming
Time to get in touch
With those who really matter
Hearing from you will mean so much.

Update your contact list
Fill it with those who care
about your well-being
and surroundings
the quality of your air.

Pay a little tribute to those
you take away.
Thank them for being with you
But it's time to go away.

Start a new list filled with contacts
Who are important to you now
Update those email addresses
Google will show you how.

Enjoy the fun you had with others
It's time to start anew
for Roll-A-Dex just say Goodbye.
There's no more use for you.

HAPPY THANKSGIVING TO ALL