

Volume 12 No. 2

# BRANCHING OUT

LIVING BRANCHES

*Live & Grow – Together*

## LIFE *Blossoms*

AT LIVING BRANCHES

INSIDE THIS ISSUE: DETAILS ON THE CAMPAIGN FOR LIVING BRANCHES





## FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

# MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

I'D LIKE TO TAKE THE TIME to acknowledge the resilience of Living Branches and how grateful I am for this community. Over the past several months, we watched our campuses slowly transform as Covid cases stayed low and vaccination rates climbed. In many ways, this season was about bringing joy and happiness back to campus.

All the while, we've remained vigilant in fighting against a virus that is frankly very much still here. That's the challenge: prioritizing the physical health of our residents without neglecting emotional wellbeing, and finding that balance between staying safe and resuming life-enriching activities for all to enjoy.

It's remarkable that, even throughout the pandemic, we haven't lost sight of our mission: serving and empowering all residents. Moving forward, The Campaign for Living Branches aims to do exactly that. Creating more private rooms in Health Care and Memory Care will allow residents' interactions with family to be as personal and unique as possible.

The capital campaign makes me reflect on interactions that I've had with my own family in Health Care. When both of my parents were at Landis Homes in Lancaster, I realized how impactful a private setting was on our time together. It has been a goal of mine to bring these accommodations to Living Branches, and I hope that you're just as excited to watch this become a reality.

Now more than ever, I believe it's clear how important it is to feel connected to loved ones and to our community. I think about a family friend of mine, Julie Gotwals, who often brings flowers into Souderton Mennonite Homes. Living Branches is so lucky to receive such beautiful flowers that she shares from her garden. Years ago, Julie would visit Souderton to spend time with family members that resided there. Although her relatives aren't with us anymore, her desire to brighten the lives of residents and staff lives on.

Julie's attention to the flower garden at Souderton, and how involved she continues to be in our community, serves as an example of the ongoing circle of care that exists at Living Branches. I am blessed to be a part of an organization that fosters such strong friendships over time, and it's truly a special thing to watch them stay intact year after year. As we build for a better future, it is these kinds of familial connections that assure me that we'll navigate all uncertainty, and overcome any obstacles, together.

*Edward D. Brubaker*

EDWARD D. BRUBAKER  
President/CEO

## BRANCHING OUT

A PUBLICATION OF LIVING BRANCHES

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## Table of Contents

- 4 Life Blossoms at Living Branches  
*Residents and staff celebrate the safe reopening of activities and amenities on the Living Branches campuses.*

- 8 Building For the Future: The Campaign for Living Branches  
*Rooted in Love. Growing Together. An overview of The Campaign for Living Branches and how it aims to enhance residents' living spaces and the quality of creative arts therapies.*

- 12 Community Updates  
*Meet Dock Woods' new executive director, Brandon Kastner, and preview the artwork that has been placed throughout Dock Woods and Souderton Mennonite Homes.*

- 13 Living Branches Employees Receive Scholarships for Committing to Higher Education  
*Living Branches congratulates scholarship recipients from our state association, LeadingAge PA, and from the Nursing Scholarship Fund.*

- 14 Campus Happenings  
*Living Branches enjoys an in-person Living U semester, residents get creative around campus, and Edward Brubaker celebrates a milestone birthday with ice cream for everyone!*

- 16 Charitable Donations to Living Branches Foundation  
*Donations received from January 1, 2021 through June 30, 2021.*





# LIFE Blossoms *at Living Branches*

FOR MANY, THE COVID vaccine brought the hope of returning to life as we once knew it and lived it on the Living Branches campuses. Just in time for summer, it seemed like the sun finally began to shine through the layer of clouds that had been hanging over our heads since early 2020. While we've remained cautious and considerate of others' safety, the continued cooperation of our residents and staff has allowed us to bask in the sunlight.

Now that several months have gone by since holding vaccine clinics on campus, we are proud to report that around 95% of all Living Branches residents, and 82% of employees are vaccinated. With these high vaccination rates, residents have been able to resume some of their most beloved activities and hobbies.

We watched excitedly as visitors entered into our hallways to reunite with residents in all levels of care. Our doors have remained open for those who pass the proper set of screening questions, and our cafes accommodate vaccinated guests who wish to share a meal with their loved ones. We've brushed the dust off of library books, hung the 'open' sign in the gift shop windows for residents and guests at Souderton Mennonite Homes and Dock Woods, and have been able to take trips to visit the park, for ice cream, and to go bowling.

Though the future is unpredictable, our faith and trust in this community will carry us through any obstacles that remain in our path. In the meantime, we ought to embrace the victories — no matter how small — and come together as long as it is safe to do so. May we never forget the loss and hardships that all residents and staff have endured over the past year, but look forward to celebrating the life that has started to bloom again at Living Branches.





### CREATIVE ARTS THERAPY CONTINUES TO BRANCH OUT

Over the past few months, creative arts therapy coordinator, Seth Laucks, and his team of student interns worked diligently to expand a program that brings happiness and camaraderie to residents in all levels of care. Our skilled interns taught the basics of dance to promote a healthy body, meditation to promote a healthy mind, and art to promote an active imagination. When connection and community was needed the most, creative arts therapy helped enrich the lives of many.

Living Branches welcomed its very first art therapist, Dana Shafer, this spring. As part of her internship, one of Dana's projects was completed with the help of residents at The Willows. Together residents created a piece of artwork that now hangs proudly near The Willows' front desk. The large canvas painting of a tree symbolizes Living Branches' experience of living through a pandemic: practicing faith, spreading hope, and coming together as a community.



### SOUDERTON MENNONITE HOMES CELEBRATES ITS RESIDENTS' COMMITMENT TO LOVE

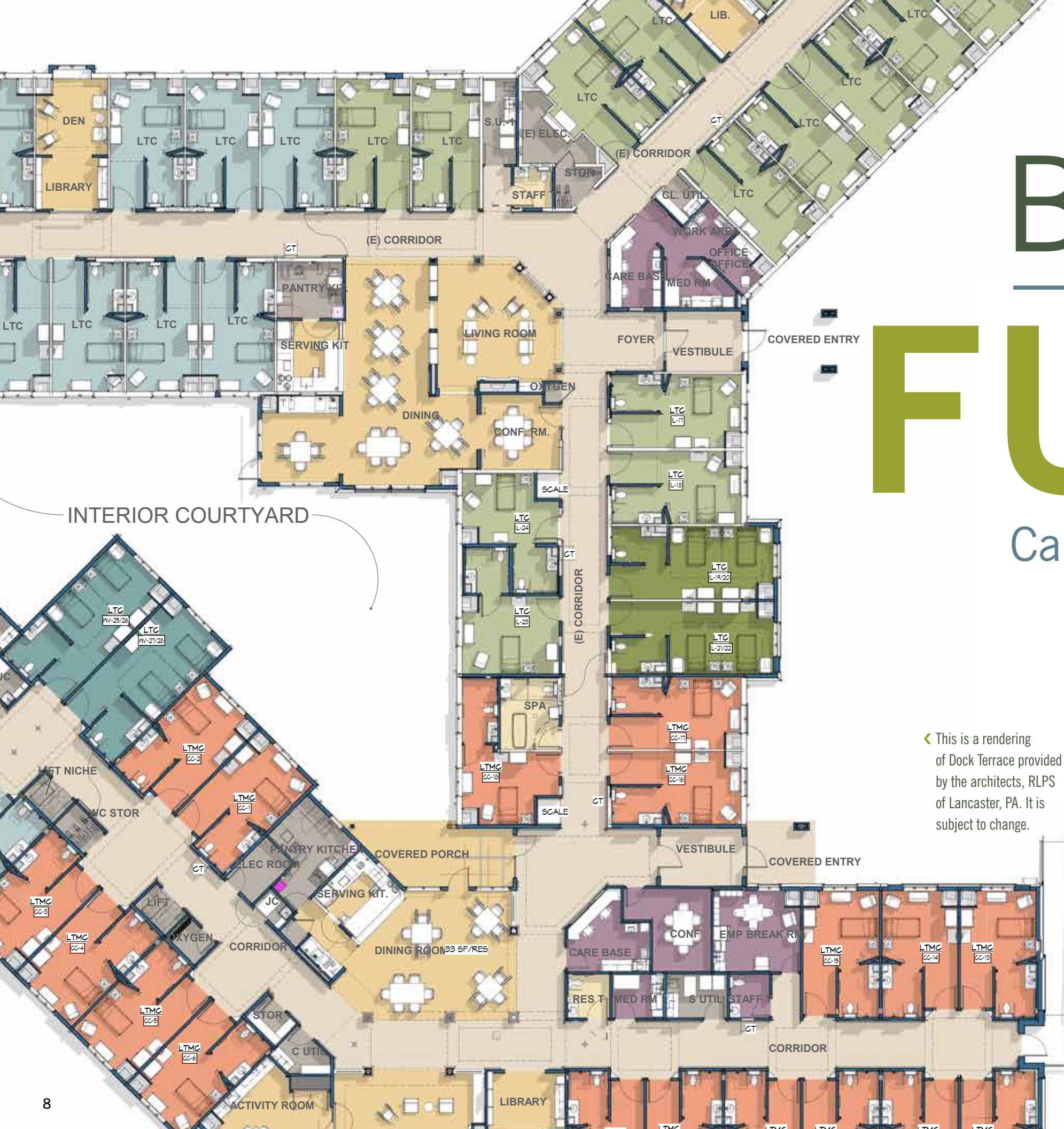
One day this summer, Pastor Joy Sawatzky took her usual spot behind the podium in the Summit View Auditorium. Although when she looked out into the audience, the sight was anything but ordinary: pink and silver balloons decorated the backs of chairs, flower petals covered tabletops, and bottles of sparkling cider were ready in the back of the room. For the first time since 2005, Souderton Mennonite Homes held a ceremony for its married residents to renew wedding vows with their spouse. More than 20 couples attended, and many friends and families watched the event live from their homes, too.

During the ceremony, Pastor Joy encouraged attendees to indicate the number of years they had been married for by raising their hands. "Less than a year?" she asked. "Less than 10 years?" she continued, but received little response from the crowd. As the milestones she listed increased in years, more and more hands lifted proudly in the air. The majority of couples shared that they were nearing 65 years of marriage. When it came time to renew vows, each partner shifted toward each other, locked eyes, and repeated the blessing that Pastor Joy read aloud.

A reception was held following the service, where residents chatted amongst each other, enjoyed light refreshments, and took turns sharing personal stories from the day they exchanged vows the first time.







# BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

Campaign for Living Branches

## ROOTED IN LOVE. GROWING TOGETHER.

◀ This is a rendering of Dock Terrace provided by the architects, RLPS of Lancaster, PA. It is subject to change.

These are the words driving the campaign that focuses on the future of Living Branches, one that will bring more joy and support to our residents. As we continue to grow and evolve together, we recognize the importance of adapting and upgrading our our Health Care and Memory Care settings. The Campaign for Living Branches addresses the changing needs for our community's quality of care and comfort, and works to further enrich our residents' lives. Over the next few years, this will be achieved through creating more private rooms and living spaces, as well as ensuring the funding of our creative arts therapy program.





### GROWING TOGETHER WITH BUILDING UPDATES

When Living Branches first designed its Health Care and Memory Care neighborhoods, the standard was to provide residents with double rooms and large common spaces. However these accommodations now reflect outdated trends. Over the years, approaches in health care have become increasingly personalized to fit individual needs. In order to best serve our residents, we must make appropriate upgrades within our communities.

Donations designated toward Growing Together with Building Updates will help support significant enhancements including private suites for residents in Health Care and Memory Care, each with a private bathroom and easily accessible shower.

The renovations also include the addition of beautifully landscaped courtyards and multiple living areas that will foster a greater sense of community. Discreet nursing stations and family-style kitchen will make residents feel at home.

To Glenn Bergey, having one of the few private suites in Souderton Mennonite Homes during his wife, Lourene's, time in hospice care was incredibly meaningful to his family. He shared that his children, as well as extended relatives, were able to focus on what was important to their loved one: visiting regularly and enjoying activities together.

*“I hope more families can take advantage of the private rooms planned at Living Branches.”*  
– Glenn Bergey



### GROWING TOGETHER WITH CREATIVE ARTS THERAPY

Another objective of The Campaign for Living Branches is to ensure funding of the creative arts therapy program. Seth Laucks, our expert in music therapy, uses music to enhance the lives of residents and the care they receive on our campuses. In his role as creative arts therapy coordinator, Seth also mentors interns and trains other staff persons to implement creative arts methods into residents' routines. Donations designated to Growing Together with Creative Arts Therapy will increase the capacity for our team to offer joyful experiences in music, art, and dance.







## JULIE GOTWALS GIVES BACK TO SOUDERTON MENNONITE HOMES

If you've visited Souderton Mennonite Homes in the summertime, you might have noticed the beautiful flowers that decorate the front desk and are placed throughout the campus. We're pleased to introduce you to the face behind these pretty arrangements. Julie Gotwals, a close friend and familiar face to many in the Living Branches community, often shares what grows on her family's farm in the warmer months.

Just a few miles down the road from Souderton Mennonites Homes is Detweiler Homestead Farm: a farm that sells flowers and home-grown vegetables. For four generations, Julie's family has maintained the farm, raising all kinds of beautiful flowers. It's always a pleasure to see the smiles that bloom on residents' faces whenever she brings around such vibrant bouquets, including the lisianthus – a particular favorite at Souderton Mennonite Homes. Living Branches thanks Julie for brightening the lives of those who reside in, work at, or visit Souderton Mennonite Homes!

## LIVING BRANCHES PARTICIPATES IN RESEARCH STUDY:

### *What Role Does Music Therapy Play in the Transition to Long-Term Care?*

Living Branches is beginning a new research project that aims to explore the impact of music therapy on residents' transitions into long-term care. Brigitte Schneible, Drexel University PhD candidate, will be conducting interviews on campus over the next several months. Brigitte's background in music therapy encompasses more than a decade's worth of experience in working at skilled nursing facilities to enrich the lives of residents.

By speaking with members of the Living Branches community, Brigitte intends to better understand how music therapy might affect residents as they transition into Personal Care, Health Care, or other long-term care settings.

Residents may be eligible for the study if they've lived in Personal Care or Health Care for less than one year, and have participated in group or one-on-one music therapy sessions. When asked about her experience so far, she had only kind remarks to share toward Living Branches. "The residents have been so lovely to speak with," she said. "They're all so mindful about being helpful toward the study, and they're excited to see it going toward my education."

Residents who are both eligible and interested in participating are encouraged to contact Seth Laucks at [Seth.Laucks@livingbranches.org](mailto:Seth.Laucks@livingbranches.org). Seth is happy to receive any resident referrals, too, on behalf of staff, families, or fellow residents!

## NEW ARTWORK FILLS THE HALLWAYS IN SOUDERTON MENNONITE HOMES AND DOCK WOODS

Personal Care at Souderton Mennonite Homes has received a new look after a recent renovation project. TV lounges and community kitchenettes have been freshly painted and redecorated, and artwork has been recently installed. By the middle of the summer, it was Dock Woods turn for a refresh. As the last step in the renovation of the campus, new artwork filled hallways, recreation areas, and dining rooms. Over the course of a week, more than 200 paintings, canvas photographs, and other decorations gave life to walls that had previously been bare. From scenic country landscapes to more abstract décor, residents and visitors are bound to find a piece that resonates with them.



## MEET BRANDON KASTNER: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AT DOCK WOODS

We are pleased to welcome Brandon Kastner to Living Branches as the new executive director for Dock Woods. Brandon joined the team in early July, arriving from Lexington, Virginia, where he served as the health facility administrator for Kendal at Lexington, a life plan community. He has worked with senior adults all throughout his career, as he also previously worked as the associate executive director at Glenaire, a life plan community in Cary, North Carolina. In addition to earning a bachelor's degree in history and his Master of Business Administration, Brandon is currently working toward a master's degree in non-profit administration from the University of Notre Dame. He and his wife, Tasha, are the parents of two young sons, Jack and Joey.



## LEADINGAGE PA AWARDS SCHOLARSHIPS TO LIVING BRANCHES EMPLOYEES

We're excited to congratulate two Living Branches employees on receiving scholarship awards from our state association, LeadingAge PA. Dawn Maher, resident assistant at Souderton Mennonite Homes, and Kristin Varilla, dining services assistant at The Willows of Living Branches, both applied for and earned \$1,200 scholarships. The award was presented to Dawn and Kristin by Megan Stedjan, LeadingAge PA's director of member engagement. The Living Branches community wishes Dawn and Kristin the best of luck in their studies.

## SUPPORTING OUR STAFF THROUGH THE NURSING SCHOLARSHIP FUND

The Nursing Scholarship Fund enables Living Branches to provide financial assistance to part-time, full-time, and weekend employees who are working toward earning a degree in nursing. Awarding scholarships to our staff encourages the pursuit of higher education, which in turn allows for our residents to receive the highest levels of care possible. Congratulations to the recipients of the 2021 nursing scholarships: Sierra Crino, Silvia Gonzalez, Morgan Klaumenzer, Michaela Miller, Alyssa Myers, Nancy Wetzell, and Kristin Varilla!



## LIVING U RETURNS TO IN-PERSON INSTRUCTION FOR FALL 2021 SEMESTER (1)

Living Branches is happy to host in-person classes for the fall semester of Living U! Thanks to the community outreach efforts of the Living U curriculum council, and coordinator Maribeth Benner, residents were offered a record-breaking number of courses to choose from. Though a few courses will still be taught over Zoom, the majority of the 31 total classes invite both instructors and participants to gather in Summit View Auditorium, Fisher Auditorium, or Dock Woods Chapel. This was also the first semester that participants were able to pay for their registration online directly through the Living Branches website. Living U's fall classes range from topics such as therapy dogs to the history of the Hatfield Packing Company, and even includes a field trip to the Francis B. Shaw Historic District in Doylestown.



## SOUDERTON RESIDENTS LEARN THE ART OF PAPERMAKING (2)

Each month we fill our life enrichment calendars with opportunities for residents to participate in activities that are interesting and engaging. This summer at Souderton Mennonite Homes, one of the many events offered for residents was to make paper from scratch. Under the instruction of in-house artist, Libby Musselman, Souderton residents gathered outside for a lesson on papermaking. Those in attendance were enlightened about the process, as they tried using matted sheets of cellulose fibers, a wire screen, and water to create paper right here on campus!



## PRESIDENT EDWARD BRUBAKER'S BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION: ICE CREAM TRUCKS COME TO CAMPUS! (3)

Our residents and staff were in for a special treat this summer! As our we continued to focus on the positivity and happiness we could bring to our campuses, president/CEO, Edward Brubaker, invited the Living Branches community to celebrate a major milestone with him. For his 60th birthday, he arranged for a Downtown Scoop ice cream truck to visit The Willows of Living Branches, Souderton Mennonite Homes, and Dock Woods. Underneath the warm August sun, residents and staff persons enjoyed their ice cream. The event created afternoons of celebration, genuine camaraderie, and light-hearted conversation amongst the Living Branches family.





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