

BRANCHING OUT

LIVING BRANCHES

Live & Grow – Together



STORIES *of* SERVICE



FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

FOLLOWING RESIDENTS' EXAMPLE OF SERVICE

ONE OF THE GREATEST LESSONS we can pass to future generations is the value of community service. The act of giving—whether time, expertise, or simply a listening ear—strengthens our communities and brings deeper meaning to life. But volunteerism is in decline across the country. Organizations that have long relied on community involvement, such as non-profits, civic organizations, and faith-based groups, now struggle to fill roles and serve their constituents as effectively as in previous decades.

It's easy to think of seniors as people on the receiving end of care and support. Indeed, we are grateful for those who give their time and talents in our communities. But Living Branches residents are also active participants in fostering a culture of giving in the wider community. Their experience, wisdom, and compassion make them uniquely equipped to give back. In this issue's cover story, you'll meet Living Branches residents who organize charitable donation drives, cheer on local first responders, pack bags of food for families, support initiatives to preserve nature, and much more.

Their actions remind us that service is not an obligation but an opportunity. Several years ago I attended a local event at which Randy Floyd, Telford's chief of police, gave a wonderful address. I wrote down one of his statements and have kept it close ever since: "If you are at a low point, look for ways to serve other people." Randy's words are echoed by ample research. Serving others is shown to bring fulfillment, strengthen social ties, and promote mental wellbeing. In a world that often feels too fast-paced and divided, the act of showing up for others is a quiet but powerful force for good.

The mission of Living Branches is rooted in purpose and joy. What better way to find purpose and joy than by giving to others? I look at the service of Living Branches residents and feel inspired to continue following in their footsteps. If lately you have found yourself seeking ways to feel more purpose and joy, look to the example set by countless Living Branches residents.

EDWARD D. BRUBAKER
President/CEO

BRANCHING OUT

A PUBLICATION OF LIVING BRANCHES

Together we empower older adults and families to lead lives of purpose and joy, guided by the Mennonite tradition of care and service to others.

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and The Willows of Living Branches
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Living Branches maintains a mailing list of people who we feel are interested in the activities, events, programs, and services of our communities. If for any reason you want your name removed from this list, please email the editor with your name, address, and request at BranchingOut@LivingBranches.org

Living Branches is a member of:



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With a Google account, you can leave a review on your campus's Google page, helping prospective residents and team members connect with us.

HELPING HEARTS

Living Branches Residents Give Back to the Community

THE SPIRIT OF SERVICE

never retires. Dozens of Living Branches residents dedicate their time and energy to non-profit organizations across the wider community. You'll find them lending their time and talents to local hospitals, thrift shops, resource centers, and more. They serve meals, lend a listening ear, sort donations, and offer support wherever it's needed, setting an inspiring example of selfless service.

"There are so many benefits to volunteering," says Annette Echanis, director of resident engagement. "Not only does service strengthen our wider community, but it provides a host of benefits to the volunteer: a chance to connect with others, get exercise and movement, develop new skills, and find purpose and joy."

In recognition of National Volunteer Month in April, the folks you'll meet on the following pages are just a few of the many Living Branches residents who give their time to make a difference. Their efforts remind us of the power of staying engaged, finding purpose, and giving as much as we're given.



GINNY AND BARB: KEYSTONE OPPORTUNITY CENTER

Sisters Ginny and Barb volunteer at Keystone Opportunity Center, a social services organization for Montgomery County residents in need of housing, food, and education services. The Keystone Opportunity Center's food pantry serves over 250 qualified households in the Souderton Area School District each month. Donations come from local families, churches, service groups—and Living Branches residents!



MARY ANN: WISSAHICKON TRAILS

For the last 15 years, Mary Ann has served Wissahickon Trails, an organization dedicated to preserving, restoring, and managing habitats in the Wissahickon watershed. In February she joined other volunteers at the organization's maple sugaring event, transforming sap into syrup. Mary Ann worked at the finishing stage, which requires boiling and testing tree sap to get the right thickness for maple syrup.



FRANK AND MARY: GRAND VIEW HOSPITAL

Frank and Mary provide pastoral care to patients at Grand View Hospital. As volunteers they offer spiritual and emotional support during what is often a challenging time in a person's life. That can mean chatting, praying together, or even just lending a compassionate ear.



SOUDERTON MENNONITE HOMES RESIDENTS: MEALS ON WHEELS

Every weekday, Souderton Mennonite Homes residents connect with Meals on Wheels to deliver lunches. Through the Generations of Indian Valley senior center, the Meals on Wheels program enlists 250 volunteers throughout the community to deliver two meals each day to 160 local seniors.

"Souderton Mennonite Homes' delivery people are very important to our program," says Pat McQue, the program's coordinator for Generations. "Having volunteers deliver for us saves a good amount of time so we can deliver to more people in the area, within our time limit for food temperatures."

OTHER ORGANIZATIONS SERVED

Living Branches residents work with a host of community organizations. Some respond to calls for specific service projects. Others volunteer on a weekly or monthly basis, helping these organizations meet their day-to-day responsibilities.

Indian Valley Arts Foundation's Concert Sundaes

Bean Bag Program

Meals on Wheels/Generations of Indian Valley

Care & Share Thrift Shoppes

Dock Mennonite Academy

Indian Creek Foundation

Mennonite Resource Center

Keystone Opportunity Center

Cards for Hospitalized Kids

Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch

Indian Valley Middle School



J. MARK AND EMMA: MCC MATERIAL RESOURCE CENTER

Each Monday J. Mark and Emma give of their time to the Mennonite Central Committee Material Resource Center. Here you can see J. Mark helping in the Center's warehouse, which processes corrugated cardboard, fabric, and other donated materials. Emma lends her time and talent to textile projects, including comforters made from donated fabric and rags created from t-shirts. Proceeds from the sale of rags support the work of supplying those in need with hygiene, infant care, and other relief kits.

LOIS: CARE & SHARE THRIFT SHOPPES

Lois volunteers weekly on the floor of the Care & Share Thrift Shoppes. The Care & Share's proceeds support the work of the Mennonite Central Committee. Volunteers like Lois help with pricing and testing merchandise, assisting on the sales floor, and more.

HELPING HANDS AT THE WILLOWS OF LIVING BRANCHES

The Helping Hands group at The Willows of Living Branches is always up to something good! They regularly give their time to make cards for hospitalized children, gifts for local law enforcement officers, care packages of donated items for the Keystone Opportunity Center, and more. Here you can see the Helping Hands crew creating gift packages for local EMS first responders.

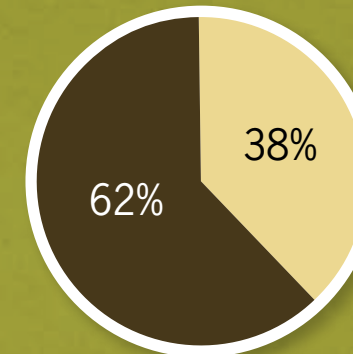
"It's empowering for residents to see what they can accomplish when they work together," says Tina Paul, life enrichment coordinator for The Willows. "There are so many ways for them to be active and engaged in the world around them."



AN INSIDE JOB: Community Volunteers at Living Branches

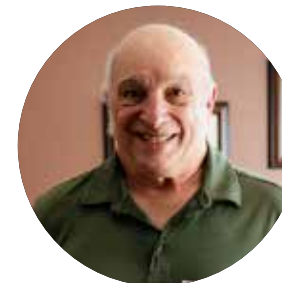
267 PEOPLE
VOLUNTEERED
FOR LIVING
BRANCHES IN 2024

24,138
HOURS
WERE CONTRIBUTED
BY VOLUNTEERS



Resident Volunteers
External Community Volunteers

TOP NEEDS MET BY OUR VOLUNTEERS		HOURS IN 2024
1	Gift Shops	6,264
2	Resident Activities	4,279
3	Creative Arts Therapy	2,443
4	Resident Association	1,386
5	Quilting	1,261
6	Audio/Visual	937



ANDY MOKRZYCKI
THE WILLOWS OF LIVING BRANCHES

"About four years ago my father-in-law, a resident at The Willows, started getting some of the guys together for activities geared toward men. Once a month we would meet and talk about a topic of their choice: the Olympics, the Korean War, sports, you name it. Now we've transitioned to talking over a game of pool or shuffleboard. It's a lot of fun! During the summers I also help a resident who enjoys gardening outside on the patio. I'll help him two or three times a week with planting, watering, and weeding. As long as I have somebody to help, I'm there."



DENISE COLE
SOUDERTON MENNONITE HOMES

"When I was looking for something to do amidst the Covid pandemic, I decided to volunteer at Souderton Mennonite Homes. I'm a physical therapist and I live nearby, so I wanted to do something that would be beneficial for residents. When I first started leading exercise classes in Personal Care I only had two people. Now we have anywhere between 12 and 18! We work on balance and coordination, cardio, and strength training for muscles that are critical to wellbeing as we age. I tell the residents, 'I'm a physical therapist and I don't like exercise, but we're doing what we need to do to stay healthy.'"



MATTHEW O'NEILL
DOCK WOODS

"I don't like to be sitting around doing nothing. So after I retired, I volunteered to work with the restorative aides who help residents in Dock Terrace [Health Care] get their exercise. As the aides guide them in walking, I push their wheelchairs so they can easily sit back down when they need to. Then we gather the residents in a circle and do seated exercise together for about 15 or 20 minutes. I get my exercise right along with them! To me, helping the residents is not work. I have been volunteering here for three and a half years, and at the end of each day I can't wait to come back."

Inner Growth

Cultivating Leaders

at Every Level



AT LIVING BRANCHES,

career growth isn't just encouraged: it's built into our culture. Across our communities, team members find opportunities to develop new skills, take on leadership roles, and build long-term careers. Through mentorship, continuing education, and internal promotions, we believe in recognizing talent and providing pathways for growth.

"Throughout our organization, you'll find many long-serving team members who have landed in different roles from when they were hired," says Kristin Thim, chief human resources officer. "Be it a director who started in laundry or a supervisor who started in dining services, the opportunity for development is a hallmark of Living Branches that sets us apart from other employers."

In the stories that follow, six team members share their experiences of growth and development. Their journeys reflect our commitment to fostering tomorrow's leaders and ensuring every team member has the opportunity to thrive.



TIARA
CLINICAL LIAISON
FOR LIVING BRANCHES

OPPORTUNITY AFTER OPPORTUNITY

"I started as a resident aide at the end of 2018, became a CNA in 2019 through the class offered at Living Branches, and then went to nursing school to become an LPN in 2022. I was a nurse at The Willows of Living Branches for two years when I decided I wanted to work full-time. My care coordinator said I should apply for Living Branches' open clinical liaison position. I had never done that type of role before, but it turned out to be perfect for me!

I love the opportunities Living Branches has given me. It's just been opportunity after opportunity, and every time I achieve something, there's another thing I can do."



JAMES
DINING SERVICES CUSTOMER SERVICE
COORDINATOR AT DOCK WOODS

MORE THAN JUST A WORKPLACE

"Seven years ago I started as a dietary aide in Health Care. Our assistant director of dining services really took me under her wing and gave me an opportunity to be a team leader. I led the front of house dining services team for a year and a half, and in 2025 I was promoted to customer service coordinator.

I also like to remind our team, especially the younger ones, that if we treat this place like a job, that's all it will ever be. But if we treat it like a community — if we ask residents their names, how their day was — then it becomes more than just a workplace. It becomes a community."



ROBERT
PURCHASING CLERK
FOR LIVING BRANCHES

THE HONOR OF WELCOMING NEW TEAM MEMBERS

"I love helping people, and I get to do that a lot through solving problems and

finding the best solutions when it comes to buying. But now I also have another role at Living Branches that's entirely different from purchasing. I help with the Living Branches Experience training for new team members.

We are intentional about making sure we get the message across on the organization's culture and how we do things here. New team members are in a fragile place of transition, and I get the honor of welcoming them and making sure they know what we are all about, and what we stand for."



ALYSSA
CARE COORDINATOR
FOR PERSONAL CARE AT DOCK WOODS

LIVING BRANCHES OPENED THE DOOR

"I started at Living Branches as an LPN in Personal Care at Dock Woods and transitioned into the role of care coordinator last year. My primary focus is to make sure residents are getting the care they need in the correct level of care, which means working very closely with our Personal Care social worker, nurses, and director, as well as other departments like dining services and life enrichment. I didn't have management experience before I took the position, but Living Branches opened the door. I've learned so much from my supervisor and the other nurses I work with."



IAN
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES
AT THE WILLOWS OF LIVING BRANCHES
AND SOUDERTON MENNONITE HOMES

SOMEONE VESTED WITH THE COMPANY

"When the director of environmental services here at The Willows of Living Branches and Souderton Mennonite Homes became the director of plant operations for Living Branches, he needed more help. So I became assistant director of environmental services for these campuses. I appreciate that Living Branches actually considers their employees for positions that come up instead of only looking outside. I think a company should always look within first. If you hire someone within the company, you're getting someone vested with the company and you already know who that person is and how they work."



TINA
LIFE ENRICHMENT COORDINATOR
AT THE WILLOWS OF LIVING BRANCHES

ART BECOMES A COMMUNAL THING

"I have a degree in fine arts from Temple where I studied painting and photography, but the plan to become a famous artist didn't really work out. Imagine that! I started with Living Branches as a life enrichment coordinator in the Serenata Memory Care neighborhood at Souderton Mennonite Homes. About three years ago I took the same role — life enrichment coordinator — but at The Willows of Living Branches.

Of course we do a lot of art, so I was able to bring my art background. Some of the residents have never picked up a paintbrush before while others have been artists their whole lives. Art becomes a communal thing when the residents sit around the table in the activity room and paint together and give each other ideas and feedback."





A Welcome Home: Community Feedback on Souderton’s New Neighborhood

A stretch of open land near Souderton Mennonite Homes will soon take on a new purpose: welcoming future Living Branches residents.

Plans are underway for a neighborhood of villas on a 26-acre plot adjacent to campus, offering spacious, modern homes.

Aacross Cowpath Road from the existing villas, this quiet retreat will give future residents the best of both worlds: a scenic, private space that still grants easy access to all the amenities of the Souderton and Lansdale campuses.

“To meet the needs of today’s and tomorrow’s residents, it’s important for

Living Branches to offer a wide range of residence types on each campus,” says Edward Brubaker, president and CEO of Living Branches. “In the planning process for this new neighborhood, we have gratefully received helpful feedback from the surrounding community.”

Living Branches is currently working with Franconia Township to finalize approval and hopes to begin pre-sales for the new homes in 2025.

A PLAN COMES TOGETHER

With construction on the horizon, Living Branches distributed a written survey to hundreds of area residents to ask about floor plans, amenities, and customization options they most want to see. The survey also invited participants to November focus groups at Souderton Mennonite Homes.

While observing the focus groups, chief advancement officer Alex Metricarti learned a lot about what the next generation wants in a home. “Tastes have changed since much of the Souderton Mennonite Homes community was built,” she explains.

TOP WISH LIST ITEMS IDENTIFIED BY FOCUS GROUP ATTENDEES INCLUDE:

- higher ceilings
- plentiful windows and natural light
- open floor plans
- first floor bedrooms
- ample outdoor space
- attached garages

“People want what they see on HGTV,” Metricarti adds. “They’re looking for a bright, sunny, open floor plan and opportunities for outdoor relaxation. So that’s what we’ll deliver.”

After the focus groups, Living Branches landed on duplex and single family floor

plans, with square footages ranging between approximately 1,600 and 2,100 square feet, plus loft or basement space.

“We really see this as an opportunity to tailor your future home to your specifications, within the parameters of the floor plans,” Metricarti says. “New residents will be able to add a range of features such as a sunroom, fireplace, or loft, and even customize a walk-out basement on several of the home sites.”

Focus group attendees also appreciated the outdoor spaces at Souderton Mennonite Homes, including pickleball, shuffleboard, and the pavilion. The new community will enhance these options with walking trails, a community garden, and a covered patio.

GETTING INTO THE DETAILS

In late February Living Branches engaged a small group of people on its future resident list to delve even deeper into floor plans and customization options.

Together the group discussed a host of details including room sizes, kitchen design, and options for “flex spaces” to supplement the open concept area.

“Future residents were very positive about the floor plans,” Metricarti says. “They especially liked the tall ceilings, large windows, and options for patios and sunrooms.”

**WON'T YOU BE
OUR NEIGHBOR?**

Once finalized, floor plans will be available to the public in the coming months. Pre-sales will begin sometime in 2025. To join the interest list, please call sales counselor Jana Alderfer at 215-723-9881 ext. 42228.

Coming Together FOR A STRONGER COMMUNITY

IN THE LAST TWO YEARS, Living Branches has made important behind-the-scenes changes to improve life for residents and team members across all campuses.

By bringing together teams that do similar work – like dining and maintenance – Living Branches is making it easier for teams to share ideas, solve problems, and use resources wisely.

“These updates help us work more closely and efficiently,” says Monique L. Cole, chief operating officer for Living Branches. “When our teams collaborate, service improves, everyday tasks get easier, and our community grows even stronger.”

Here’s how these changes are making a difference, from keeping buildings in top shape to enhancing mealtimes.

ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

Each Living Branches campus has an on-site environmental services team, but before 2024, they had few opportunities to collaborate across campuses. That changed when Dave Moore was promoted to director of plant operations, overseeing environmental services at all campuses.

With six years of experience at The Willows of Living Branches and Souderton Mennonite Homes, Dave now ensures all campuses benefit from shared expertise. This has already led to consolidating waste management under one contract and providing extra support during construction projects at Souderton Mennonite Homes and Dock Woods.

DINING SERVICES

Dining services also used to operate separately at each campus. Now with all teams under one leader, they can share best practices and take advantage of bulk purchasing.

In February, Ted Gody, formerly senior director of dining services at The Willows and Souderton Mennonite Homes, stepped into the new role of director of culinary services. Under his leadership, Dock Woods will transition away from contracted dining services, creating a fully in-house program managed by Living Branches. This will increase our purchasing power and allow us to implement consistent quality, service, and menu standards across all campuses.

ADVANCEMENT

In early 2025, the fund development team joined a newly-created advancement department, which also includes sales and marketing, communications, resident engagement, creative arts therapy, and the Living U lifelong learning program.

Alex Metricarti was named chief advancement officer to lead this new department. Following the retirement of fund development director Keith Heavener, Colin Ingram was named associate director of fund development and oversees fundraising, donor stewardship, and campus gift shops.

By bringing together teams focused on relationships and storytelling, Living Branches is better positioned to strengthen connections and enhance the vibrancy of our community.



DOCK WOODS
RESIDENTS ENJOY
INDOOR EXERCISE
TOGETHER

BEATING THE WINTER BLUES

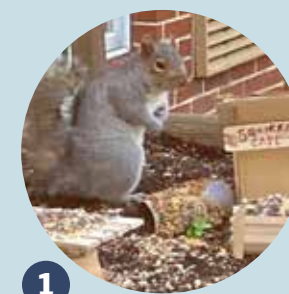
When the weather outside is frightful, our neighbors are still delightful! Living Branches residents came together over the winter months for celebratory meals, cultural celebrations, creative crafts, and other festive fun.

1: RESIDENTS AT THE WILLOWS TREATED THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD SQUIRRELS TO A SQUIRREL CAFÉ, COMPLETE WITH PEANUT BUTTER, SEEDS, AND A TINY PICNIC TABLE.

2 & 5: FOOD AND FELLOWSHIP WERE ON THE MENU AT SOUDERTON MENNONITE HOMES' ANNUAL WINTER DINNER, LIT BY FAIRY LIGHTS IN THE APPLE ORCHARD CAFÉ. AFTER THE MEAL RESIDENTS WERE TREATED TO A CONCERT WITH THE ZION MENNONITE CHURCH CHOIR.

3: IN CELEBRATION OF LUNAR NEW YEAR, RESIDENTS AT THE WILLOWS CREATED THEIR OWN PAPER LANTERNS.

4: SERENATA MEMORY CARE RESIDENTS COOKED UP HOMEMADE BASIL PASTA USING HERBS GROWN RIGHT IN THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD.



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OPEN FOR BUSINESS AT THE WILLOWS

Looking for a beautiful greeting card? Or maybe some candy, cozy slippers, or a stylish scarf? Residents and visitors at The Willows of Living Branches can find all this and more at The Marketplace, a cozy shop with shelves of unique gifts and treats. Conveniently located near the South entrance, The Marketplace is open several hours a week for browsing and shopping. Thanks to the volunteers and team members who made The Marketplace a new destination at The Willows!

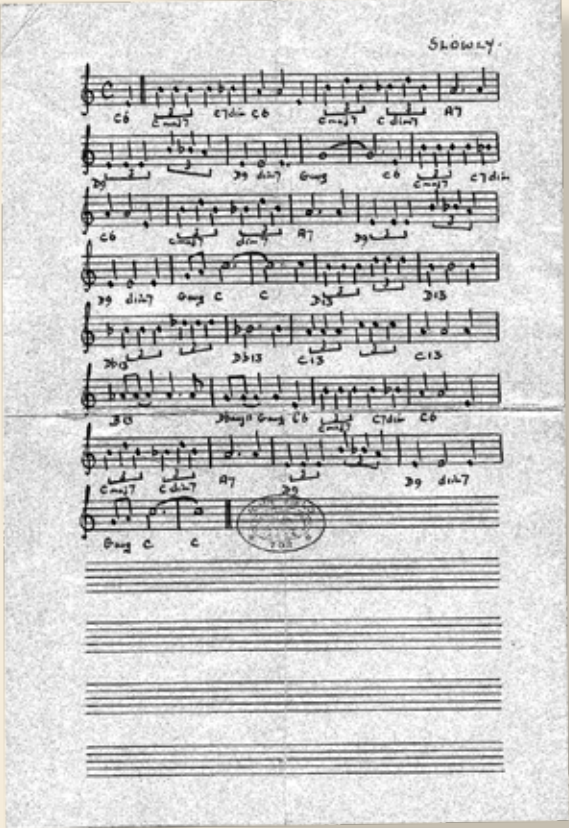


A LOVE-LY CELEBRATION

Valentine's Day is always a welcome treat! Residents at Dock Woods enjoyed their annual Valentine's Day dinner, Souderton Mennonite Homes had their campus extravaganza, and The Willows of Living Branches celebrated with love-themed treats, cards, and more.



FRANCES (LEFT) AND GRACE SPEAK WITH CREATIVE ARTS THERAPY COORDINATOR, SETH LAUCKS, ABOUT THE SONG.



FRANCES HELD ON TO THIS ORIGINAL PIECE OF MUSIC COMPOSED BY A FRIEND IN THE 1940S.

A SONG WITH A STORY



TO GET THE FULL STORY AND HEAR GRACE AND SETH'S RENDITION — titled "From John to Frances, With Grace"— scan the QR code with your phone's camera or visit the Living Branches YouTube channel.

ONE OF FRANCES' MOST TREASURED keepsakes is a piece of sheet music, composed and handwritten by her friend and colleague, John. After World War II, the two worked together at a farm-turned-medical facility in England, where Frances spent many years. Under the musical notation, John wrote a heartfelt note expressing his affection and how much he missed their friendship.

Decades later, now living at The Willows of Living Branches and thousands of miles from her roots in Europe, Frances had never actually heard the song. That is until her neighbor, Grace, offered to help. As an accomplished pianist, Grace was able to bring the composition to life, improvising where the notation was ambiguous.

Inspired by their connection, creative arts therapy coordinator Seth Laucks joined Frances and Grace to learn more about the song's history. He then added his own touch: original lyrics sharing the ups and downs of Frances' early years.

"This is just one example of how our music programs encourage residents to foster connections to their history and one another," Laucks said.

Charitable Donations to the Living Branches Foundation

JULY 1 TO DECEMBER 31, 2024

Gifts to the Agape Fund

Audrey J. Alderfer
Earl H. Alderfer
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Ruth Baker
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Homes Auxiliary
Lois F. Stevens

Shirley Texter
Towamencin Mennonite Church
Evelyn Wismer
Paul and Alma Yothers

Gifts to the Dock Village Youth Fund

Jane P. Graham Estate

Gifts to the Fund for Housing for Retired Church Workers

Lowell and Brenda Delp
Noah and Sara Kolb
Rachel A. Schmucker

Gifts to the Living Branches Benevolent Care Fund

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To submit a Google review for your community, you must have a Google/Gmail account. After signing in on a desktop computer or a mobile device, follow these steps to leave a Google review:

- 1** Do a Google search for your community: The Willows of Living Branches, Souderton Mennonite Homes, or Dock Woods.
- 2** When the search results appear, look for the community's profile. On a desktop computer, the profile appears on the right side of the Google search results page. On a mobile device, the profile appears at the top of the Google search results page.
- 3** On a desktop, scroll down the page and click the "Write a review" button. On a mobile device, tap the "Reviews" button.
- 4** Leave a five-star rating and your comments about the campus, residents, activities, team members, or anything else you'd like the world to know.

**THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING
THE LIVING BRANCHES COMMUNITY!**

