

Volume 15 No. 2

BRANCHING OUT

LIVING BRANCHES

Live & Grow – Together



THE NEXT ERA OF

MEMORY CARE

INSIDE THIS ISSUE: MEMORY CARE COMMUNITIES ENHANCE MONTESSORI PROGRAMMING



FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

OPENING DOORS FOR MEMORY CARE RESIDENTS

SINCE THE 2008 AFFILIATION of Souderton Mennonite Homes and Dock Woods, there has never been more active construction across our campuses. By the time you read these words, extensive projects at Souderton Mennonite Homes and Dock Woods will be almost complete, creating beautiful new communities for residents in Health Care and Memory Care.

In a time when many institutions are downsizing their Health Care neighborhoods, Living Branches, with help from generous donors and community partners, is investing in this area. I am grateful we have the resources and expertise to serve these individuals, helping them find purpose and joy every day.

In this issue's cover story, you'll read about Living Branches' commitment to providing exceptional Memory Care at the Personal Care and Health Care levels. The new communities at Souderton Mennonite Homes and Dock Woods will allow us to provide excellent care for residents with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. From more natural lighting and more common areas to private rooms, I have no doubt these new communities will serve our residents, families, and team members well for years to come.

But Memory Care isn't just about buildings; it's about what happens within them. For more than five years, Living Branches has offered all residents creative arts therapy and Montessori programming — approaches that are especially impactful for Memory Care residents. I recall my mother's ability to mouth along to hymns played in her memory support community, even in the later stages of dementia when she could no longer speak. Living Branches' dedication to these unique programs influenced the design of our new Memory Care communities and will continue to enhance the lives of our residents and their loved ones.

When a resident joins Living Branches, we commit to providing a lifetime of excellent, compassionate care. From the new buildings to the growth of our Montessori program, Memory Care residents will have more opportunities than ever before at Living Branches. In a world closing more and more doors to seniors, opening new ones is simply the right thing to do.

EDWARD D. BRUBAKER
President/CEO

BRANCHING OUT

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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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Help prospective residents connect with Living Branches by leaving a review on your community's Google page.





OPENING THE DOOR TO THE NEXT ERA OF MEMORY CARE

“Transformative.”

*“A dramatic
difference.”*

“Game changer.”



TALK TO NAOMI HAWKINS, director of Health Care Services for Dock Woods, and you’ll hear her use these terms for Country Cottage: a unique neighborhood at Dock Woods for Health Care residents living with dementia.

“Residents often have a decrease in anxiety when they move from Dock Terrace to Country Cottage,” Naomi said. “In this more intimate environment, there’s an overall feeling of calm.”

But more than two decades after Country Cottage first opened its doors at Dock Woods, Living Branches leadership knew it needed a refresh – more space, more privacy, and more opportunities for resident engagement.

As importantly, Living Branches wanted to bring these unique benefits to Souderton Mennonite Homes, which has never had a Memory

Care neighborhood within Health Care. Its existing Memory Care neighborhood, Park View, is available only for Personal Care residents.

“We’ve always been in the business of caring for those who are less able to advocate for themselves,” said Edward D. Brubaker, President/CEO of Living Branches. “From my perspective, it’s a question of doing the right thing. And the right thing is to have a Memory Care community in Health Care.”

CONSTRUCTING THE FUTURE OF MEMORY CARE

As the first Memory Care neighborhood to be transformed at Living Branches, the latest iteration of Country Cottage welcomed residents in mid-2023. The new Country Cottage is brand new, along with other areas in Dock Terrace that have been newly built or extensively renovated.

Construction is almost complete on the other new Memory Care neighborhoods at Souderton Mennonite Homes, too. One neighborhood will be for Personal Care residents and the other for Health Care, just like Country Cottage.

Despite numerous benefits for residents, most senior living communities do not offer Memory Care neighborhoods within skilled nursing. It usually comes down to cost: building new facilities and staffing them with a dedicated team is not within every organization’s means.

For most for-profit corporations, these costs do not align with the need to generate the highest return on shareholder investments. But as a non-profit, Living Branches is able to think about investments differently, focusing on what is needed now and down the road.

“We have to have a positive bottom line, but that bottom line is there to be reinvested in the future of the organization,” Ed explained. “We have to think about what’s best for our residents, families, and team members to make sure we’re here to serve our community for generations to come.”

Work at both campuses was funded in part by Rooted in Love, Growing Together: The Campaign for Living Branches. Local individuals and organizations contributed more than \$4.3 million toward the campaign, which wrapped up in June 2024 at a donor celebration at Souderton Mennonite Homes (pictured above).

“Generous board members, residents, and partners of Living Branches recognized the need for this kind of care and generously contributed to the campaign,” said Keith Heavener, director of fund development at Living Branches. “These projects have always been more than just new buildings. They are transforming how our residents and community benefit from Memory Care.”



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Living Branches is able
to think about investments
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Additional funds for work at Souderton Mennonite Homes came from the Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program, thanks to advocacy from Senator Maria Collett and Representative Steve Malagari.

THE BENEFITS OF MEMORY CARE IN HEALTH CARE

Later this summer, Souderton Mennonite Homes will open its own version of Country Cottage, with many design and layout elements drawing inspiration from the success of the new Country Cottage.



Larger windows provide ample natural light, brightening spaces and helping residents feel more connected to their environment.

Bright, modern colors on the walls, carpet, and artwork create a more home-like, attractive atmosphere.

Special rhythm lighting mimics the sun's patterns, helping to regulate residents' circadian rhythm and promote a more natural sleep cycle.

Sensory plantings, accessible garden beds, and electricity for instruments and speakers in the courtyard enrich residents' outdoor experiences.

Spacious common areas promote social and life enrichment activities, offering more areas where residents can be together or take a restorative moment alone.



IN COUNTRY COTTAGE AND ITS SISTER MEMORY CARE COMMUNITY AT SOUDERTON MENNONITE HOMES, THOUGHTFUL DESIGN ELEMENTS HAVE FURTHER ENHANCED THESE BENEFITS.

“The natural light has made such a difference,” says Rhoda, whose husband lives in Country Cottage. “The big skylights and lower windows in the residents’ rooms are wonderful. And when we have extra relatives coming, we use the family room quite a bit. Six or seven family members from out of town have been able to visit at once.”

Naomi points to several reasons residents tend to thrive in Country Cottage – and will likely benefit from the same kind of care at Souderton Mennonite Homes.

“The environment itself is smaller and built like a home, and caregivers are more plentiful and consistent,” she said. “There’s less stimulation because the community is centrally built with rooms off to the sides, which lets our team monitor for safety and medical needs. We also see fewer wandering behaviors and higher engagement in life enrichment activities throughout the day.”

Jill Arroyo, director of Health Care services at Souderton Mennonite Homes, echoes this excitement for a more nurturing space. “I’m looking forward to seeing residents and their families experience a calmer environment,” she said. “The new neighborhood will afford person-centered engagement and a visually pleasing environment that lets us focus on what residents CAN do.”

ROOM TO GROW TOGETHER

For Ed private rooms are another way Living Branches is “doing the right thing.” When his parents lived in a Life Plan Community, he saw firsthand the difference a private room can make.

“It’s been a longtime vision of mine to have more private rooms,” Ed said. “When my mom moved from Memory Care at the Personal Care level into Health Care, having a private room was a big deal. While I understand the cost perspective of asking residents to share, it’s more dignified to give them their own space.”

Naomi has already seen the difference between companion suites and private rooms and is excited for Souderton Mennonite Homes to offer similar residences in Memory Care.

“Private rooms have been transformative for residents,” she explained. “We see fewer anxiety-related behaviors in Memory Care and conflict between residents. Private rooms also give each resident a retreat after spending time with a larger group and allow them to add more personal touches, helping them feel oriented in their new home.”

The new rooms also offer more room for equipment and space to help residents with transferring and repositioning. And activities of daily living, including hygiene and grooming, are less challenging with private bathrooms, Naomi added. Team members can care for residents’ needs more easily when they don’t have to walk down the hallway to a shared shower. “It’s more like what they would have been used to at home,” Naomi said.

Families also enjoy visits more thanks to the new private rooms and common areas.

“Family members are really, really thankful for the private rooms,” Naomi explained. “I do tend to see more families bringing in younger kids because there’s more space for them in resident rooms, the den, and the outdoor patio space. Visitors always bring their residents – and everyone else in the neighborhood – a lot of joy!”

“It’s a game changer,” she continued, “to have all that space available to engage people of different abilities at different levels.”

“The new community has been so impactful on residents’ quality of life, every day. We’ve seen a change in how residents express themselves: they seem more content and interact more with other residents and our team.”

NICK ROSATO
assistant director of Health Care services at Dock Woods

“One resident in particular was quite restless prior to coming to Country Cottage, but we saw a marked change after he moved. He even expressed how much he enjoyed the space – it was wonderful to see how much he appreciated it.”

LINDA MEULENERS
nurse in Country Cottage

“It’s been such a great change to see the move toward more private rooms and bigger spaces. That means more personalized care for all our residents.”

BRIANNA MARKGRAF
care coordinator for Health Care services at Dock Woods

“Having a dedicated Memory Care unit within the Health Care community will allow residents experiencing cognitive declines to live in a place that not only keeps them safe, but allows them to experience an interactive environment. With specially trained team members, the neighborhood can offer person-centered engagement opportunities.”

JILL ARROYO
director of Health Care services at Souderton Mennonite Homes

Joy Throughout the Day:

Well Designed Memory Care Communities Enhance Montessori Programming



On a balmy afternoon in late May, residents of the Country Cottage neighborhood in Dock Terrace enjoyed two of life's greatest joys: music and time outside in the fresh air.

Accompanied by certified creative arts therapist Seth Laucks, some residents played xylophones as Seth sang. Others tapped their feet to the music, enjoying the birdsong in the background.

A year ago, this kind of afternoon would have been impossible for these residents – not because they live in Memory Care within the Health Care community at Dock Woods, but because their outdoor space couldn't accommodate it.

"The previous patio in Country Cottage was very small," said Annette Echanis, the director of resident engagement for Living Branches. "When the new Country Cottage neighborhood opened in the summer of 2023, the addition of a large, covered outdoor space with access to electricity let us take engagement outside."

This joyful group music therapy session is just one way that new construction and renovations in Living Branches' Memory Care neighborhoods will offer new and better opportunities for life enrichment programs. That's especially important for residents in Memory Care at the Health Care level.

"As dementia progresses, the ability to self-initiate engagement becomes impaired," Annette explained. "The design of the new Memory Care communities at Dock Woods and Souderton Mennonite Homes allows us to adapt engagement opportunities to meet the needs of residents who require memory support."

MONTESSORI IN MEMORY CARE

All Living Branches communities have access to dedicated life enrichment coordinators who plan programs, activities, and trips based on the interests and needs of their residents.

Activities at the Residential Living level are quite different than what's offered in Health Care, but the underlying principles are the same: know each resident as an individual, learn their interests and capabilities, and offer appropriate group activities and prepared environments for solo exploration.

This is known as the Montessori method, a philosophy Living Branches adopted in 2018 to great success.

"Programming looks different depending on whether the Memory Care resident is at the Personal Care or Health Care level, but it's all person-centered," Annette explains. "For instance, Memory Care residents at the Personal Care level can go outside to the secured patio area and use a watering can and pick dead flowers off a plant in a raised bed."



Residents in the new Memory Care community in Health Care at Souderton Mennonite Homes will get to work with a dedicated full-time life enrichment assistant, Natalie Reich (pictured at right), who joined Living Branches in July.

Natalie interned at Living Branches during her senior year at Cedarville University and is enthusiastic about returning as a full-time team member. "I did a little bit of everything: leading activities, playing music with the residents, sometimes just hanging out with them," she said. "I'm excited to give Memory Care residents that special attention."

“Health Care residents may need additional help to garden, but if we accompany them outside and provide a container of water, they can also enjoy tending the flowers. It’s our job to change the approach and the environment to give residents joyful moments, no matter their level of care.”

DESIGN WITH PURPOSE

Many of the design elements that have transformed Country Cottage programming will also be used in Souderton Mennonite Homes’ new Memory Care neighborhood at the Health Care level, set to open in the fall.

One major improvement is separate rooms with different purposes, allowing residents to be in the right environment at any point of the day.

“Now we have a den and library area where residents can go if they prefer a smaller environment with less stimulation,” Annette says. “There’s also a separate dining room, living room, and activity space, giving residents the chance to be in different spaces throughout the day as various programs occur at once.”

Annette also appreciates the enhanced A/V systems that life enrichment coordinators can use to access music

and streaming programs in common areas. Sensory videos and landscapes are popular in Country Cottage, and the larger space lets more residents participate.

But what she’s most excited about – especially for the spring, summer, and early fall months – is the vast improvement to outdoor spaces at both campuses.

“To take the outdoor design one step above the general landscaping in the rest of the community, we worked with a designer who has experience creating outdoor spaces for memory support,” she explains. “From the life enrichment perspective, that’s really exciting.”

And of course, live music for creative arts therapy and other fun programs will be an option at Souderton Mennonite Homes as well, thanks to an outdoor space like the one created for Country Cottage at Dock Woods.

“Souderton Mennonite Homes will have a garden specifically designed to engage Memory Care residents in the Health Care community,” she says. “There will be a larger space with access to electricity, so we can use microphones and speakers during creative arts therapy sessions. Plantings like lavender and lamb’s ear will provide sensory stimulation. We’ll also have

water features, a spinning feature, bird houses, and other elements that touch all senses.”

PURPOSE AND JOY – AT EVERY LEVEL

When Annette considers the future of Memory Care at Living Branches, she echoes the need for personalized care. She is excited to see how dedicated memory support communities impact residents and their loved ones in all levels of care.

“I think it’s huge that we’re investing in this,” she says. “If you go to Country Cottage today, you’ll see residents who can still do word searches, play the piano, or look through memory books. When they are given opportunities to function at their highest level, they experience moments of joy throughout the day.”



Natalie will work closely with Michelle Moreland (pictured at left), who has provided life enrichment for Health Care residents at Souderton Mennonite Homes for 17 years.

Natalie and Michelle bring a wealth of energy and experience to the new Memory Care neighborhood in Health Care. Michelle is especially eager to care for residents in a space designed to increase calm and well-being.

“We can engage residents with the same meaningful, person-centered programming we’ve been providing in Health Care,” Michelle said. “The new neighborhood will reduce unnecessary

stimulation so we can optimize the right kind of interactions, including group and individual Montessori activities.”

Those activities typically revolve around the senses, including hand massages with scented lotions, sensory kits, and time with therapy dogs. Music is also used extensively, engaging residents at an individual and small group level.

“We’ve always given residents with dementia their own life enrichment experiences, tailoring activities to them,” Michelle added. “We try to meet the needs of all of our residents, no matter what stage of life they are in.”

PICTURE YOURSELF HERE!

New Health Care and Memory Care communities are ready for residents



The newly built Memory Care and Health Care communities at Souderton Mennonite Homes and Dock Woods are ready to welcome new residents.

TO LEARN MORE, CALL ADMISSIONS SPECIALIST
Jennifer Bostic at 215-723-9881 ext. 42290.

Souderton Mennonite Homes

PERSONAL CARE AND HEALTH CARE
FOR RESIDENTS LIVING WITH DEMENTIA

Designed to meet today's needs while preserving a home-like feeling, the new neighborhoods at Souderton Mennonite Homes will offer:

- Large, private resident rooms with European showers
- Bright, sunny rooms with ample natural light
- New activity spaces and common areas

Dock Woods

24/7 SUPPORT FOR HEALTH CARE RESIDENTS

The final phase of renovations at Dock Terrace are complete. Those in need of short- or long-term care can enjoy:

- Large, private resident rooms with European showers
- New activity spaces and common areas
- New central courtyard with furniture and plantings



JUST A CLICK AWAY:

Electronic Portal Connects Residents to Campus Life

Residents in some Living Branches neighborhoods are living in the future thanks to the recent rollout of a new electronic resident portal for Living Branches.

Created by Touchtown, the new online portal helps Living Branches residents access a wealth of community information – from the comfort of home or on the go. All it takes is an internet connection!

“The portal is a one-stop-shop for information that used to live in many places,” says Alexandra Metricarti, chief marketing and public relations officer for Living Branches. “As new features roll out and more residents start using the portal, we hope it becomes a daily habit for many residents and offers connectivity we didn’t have before.”

Residential Living neighborhoods at Souderton Mennonite Homes and Dock Woods can use the portal to access:

- Activity calendars
- Dining menus
- Resident and team member directories
- Content from the campus TV channels
- Resident meeting minutes
- A library of digitized forms, campus newsletters, committee information, and more

“Residents can personalize their profiles with a picture, preferred contact information, and as much or as little information as they’d like to share about their background, hobbies, and interests,” Alexandra says. “Because everything is searchable, residents can easily find and connect with neighbors who share hobbies or life stories.”

Residential Living community members can access the portal on kiosks at each campus or any personal device with internet access, such as phones, tablets, and computers. Plans call for opening it to Personal Care residents once rollout is complete with Residential Living.

“This is something we’ve been asking for and looking forward to having.”

THELMA MACK
Souderton Mennonite Homes
resident and president of the
community’s Residents’ Association.



STATE OF THE ART



LIVING BRANCHES RESIDENTS SHOW OFF THEIR CREATIVE SIDES

The arts abound at Living Branches! In the spring and early summer, residents across our communities rolled up their sleeves and worked together on painting, gardening, and a filmmaking project with fellow residents and team members.



PARK VIEW GIFTED A MURAL FROM RESIDENTS AT THE WILLOWS

After many weeks of work on a tactile farmland mural, residents at The Willow of Living Branches donated their creation to the Memory Care residents in Park View at Souderton Mennonite Homes.





CHALK THE WALK

On Community Cares Day, Indian Valley Middle School students created beautiful artwork and positive messages on the sidewalks at Souderton Mennonite Homes and Dock Woods.



HARMONY HOUSE GOES HOLLYWOOD

Lights, camera, action! Residents and team members in Harmony House wrote, filmed, and edited a short crime caper, *The Lost Diamond*, which premiered to a full house in April.



ART AND HOBBY DAY

Souderton Mennonite Homes residents and team members exhibited their artwork and hobbies at the community's Art and Hobby Day in May.



STRUTTING THEIR STUFF

Dock Woods residents and team members performed music, dances, and laugh-out-loud skits at the 30th annual Dock Woods Talent Show.





IT'S A ZOO OUT THERE!

Joined by Dock Woods volunteers and team members, Harmony House residents spent an enjoyable afternoon at the Elmwood Park Zoo in May.



A START IN ART

Temple University seniors Julie Vasquez (above) and Jenna Rosenblatt (below) explored potential careers in art therapy through spring semester internships at The Willows of Living Branches.

CLASS IS IN SESSION

In the spring session of Living U, the lifelong learning institute of Living Branches, students tried their hands at painting, flower arranging, herb gardening, and more.



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**Living Branches
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Benevolent care for residents
at all Living Branches
campuses

**Souderton Mennonite
Homes Agape Fund** –
Benevolent care for residents
at Souderton Mennonite
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**Dock Woods and The
Willows Sharing Fund** –
Benevolent care for residents
at Dock Woods and The
Willows of Living Branches

**Dock Village Youth
Fund** – Academic
scholarships and learning
incentives for residents at
Dock Village

**Fund for Creative Arts
Therapy** – Enhancing the
lives of residents through the
healing power of music, art,
and dance

**Fund for Housing
for Retired Church
Workers** – Entrance
fee assistance for retired
Mennonite pastors and
spouses

**Nursing Scholarship
Fund** – Education grants
for employees interested
in furthering their nursing
training

Restricted Gifts Fund –
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