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# engage!



**SIDE-BY-SIDE  
STORY BY STORY**

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## A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

# A CULTURE OF CONNECTIONS

“Connection is why we’re here; it is what gives purpose and meaning to our lives.”

– Academic, author, and researcher Brené Brown

One of the most common things we hear from people visiting our communities, whether it’s a first-time guest or a teammate celebrating decades of service, is how warm, welcoming, and friendly UMC feels. These are attributes every senior living organization would love to claim, but what sets our communities apart is that we live it every day.

In this issue, you’ll read about residents and teammates who show “connection” isn’t just a buzzword – it’s our culture. From residents who go out of their way to welcome new neighbors, to teammates who form lasting bonds with seniors they care for and friends they serve with, these bonds demonstrate abundant life in action.

As you read their stories, I hope you feel what so many others do when they step through our doors: UMC is a place where people truly care for one another.

Happy reading!

Rebecca

# FROM CLIENT TO CHOSEN FAMILY

By Mike Murabito, Digital Marketing Manager

Throughout senior living and home care, especially between caregivers and those they **support, friendship can quietly blossom** in everyday moments.

**H**owever, every so often, something more lasting takes root — a bond that begins in service and grows into something far deeper.

That's exactly what I discovered as I sat down with Irene Freeman, a Collingswood Manor resident and HomeWorks client, and her trusted HomeWorks Companion, Doreen Taylor.

As they spoke, it quickly became clear this wasn't your typical client-caregiver relationship. Their connection runs much deeper than that.

When Irene first moved into Collingswood Manor, Doreen supported her as an employee of a different home care agency. After Doreen became a member of the HomeWorks team, the two were separated for about six months while Irene remained with her previous agency.



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**But something didn't feel right.**

"She wasn't happy," Doreen recalled.

At Irene's request, the two were ultimately reunited, and picked up right where they left off.

Their strong emotional bond shows in the little things — like their salon days every two weeks, when Doreen does Irene's nails, or even a leisurely trip to a nearby park.

Over time, these two women have connected over many aspects of life, including deep personal loss. While they don't dwell on it, their understanding sometimes goes unsaid.

"I don't just say I know how you feel," Doreen said emphatically. *"I've been there."*

Before they left to enjoy a lovely Friday lunch together, and in between many laughs, smiles, and tears, Irene made it clear that her feelings for Doreen go beyond the usual client-caregiver dynamic.

"It's more than a friendship for me," Irene said, misty-eyed, as Doreen gently put her arm on her shoulder, offering a warm smile.

But what stood out most in our time together was how often one word came up when they spoke about each other.

**"She's family," Doreen beamed.**

# SERVICE & SISTERHOOD

*By Gary Engelstad, Director of Transformational Giving*

**T**here’s a famous Cole Porter song called “Friendship” which includes the following unforgettable lyrics: “Friendship, friendship, it’s the perfect blendship.”

Nowhere do those lyrics come to life like they do for Rose Daye and Eva Scott, residents at the UMC Community Covenant Place.

If you are a strong believer in fate, you would surely agree that Rose’s path from Long Branch, New Jersey, would somehow intersect with Eva’s path from Gloucester, Virginia, and a love-filled and faith-driven friendship would be born.

**R**ose and Eva have been residents of Covenant Place for 23 and 18 years, respectively. Their commitment to each other is matched only by their compassion and willingness to help their fellow Covenant residents. Both women have taken on numerous leadership roles in resident clubs and initiatives.



“I help run a group called Reflections,” Rose explained. “When Giselle asked me to do it, I had to pray over it. She said ‘Rose, I know who you are, come up with a name.’ So, I prayed over it and asked the Lord what I should do, and He said

‘Reflections,’ so you can reflect on life. It’s a beautiful, inspirational group. We meet twice a month, and 15 or 16 attend. We just talk about things, let them know they aren’t alone, and help them to navigate. Some people get depressed as they get older and have nobody. If Eva and I can help somebody, we’ll go to the store for them. One time, we heard someone wasn’t feeling well. Eva and I got in the car to get him soup and orange juice. He couldn’t believe it.”

Eva has also been a leader in the community. “The administrator asked me to head up a group called Life Choices,” she detailed. “I organized a trip to Pennsylvania Dutch Country three times. We left at 7am and returned at 8pm after shopping, dinner, and the Farmer’s Market. Everybody loved it, especially Good & Plenty Restaurant. I did nine trips to Atlantic City. We could sit on the boardwalk and do whatever we wanted to, and we gave out prizes on the bus. Rose always said a prayer for me before we left.”

Their true passion these days is putting their decorating skills to work. They love making the community spaces as welcoming as possible and have been doing so together for almost twenty years. Both ladies create immaculate displays and table arrangements for different seasons and holidays, and Eva’s Christmas trees are known for being beautiful and unique each year.

Another thing they have in common is their faith. “Every night I pray for the staff, I pray for this building, I pray for every resident,” Rose shared. Eva agreed, adding, “I ask God to give everybody in here an extra portion of love, health, and strength, and I pray for the staff to be safe coming here and going home to their families.”

Rose summed up why she puts her heart and soul into her community: “In this building, there is so much love, so much family. I try to let my light shine. If you let your light shine, somebody will see it. You may not be able to encourage everybody, but you can encourage somebody.”

*It truly is a perfect blendship.*

EMPOWERMENT SPOTLIGHT

# SOCIAL CONNECTIONS



*The Shores was fortunate to have Katie McLaughlin, a student at West Chester University, as a Sales & Marketing intern this summer. As part of her various projects to showcase life at The Shores, Katie sat down with 87-year-old resident Marion Ingram to gather her perspective on senior empowerment. This excerpt covers Marion's experience moving to The Shores and her tips for seniors acclimating to an assisted living environment. To read Katie's full Empowerment Spotlight on our blog, scan the QR code below.*



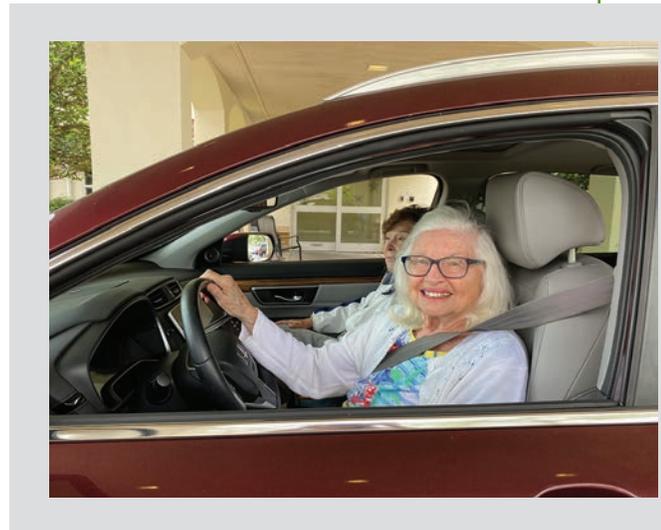
*By Kathryn McLaughlin, Sales & Marketing Intern*

**M**arion touches on a conversation with her children as the motivation for her early decision to move to an assisted living community. “My children often ask me why I decided to leave my home, which was attached to the real estate office where they worked. They would check on me after they closed the office and say, “You’ve got it made! Why would you leave there and come here?” And I said because of the social aspect; you have to form a new network.” Marion emphasized the importance of socialization and how it is a necessity for life. According to a peer-reviewed journal from PLOS Medicine, Sommerlad et al. argued that “...Socialization is well understood as an integral part of maintaining cognitive function and overall emotional wellbeing” (as cited in Hagstrom et al., 2021, p. 10-11).

Marion states, “Try everything a couple times. You can’t do them all – you can pick out what you like, but you’ve got to try them first. That’s why bingo is so important, because every time somebody wins, they call out their name. You connect the name to the person, and you get a chance to congratulate them in the hall for the rest of the day! You get to talk to people that way.”

Marion also shares advice on taking the first step to make new friends. “I have been here for five months, and the first two months, I went to The Sound [dining services], and every time I went in, I’d look to see where there was an opening across from somebody so I could come up and say, ‘Hi, is somebody coming to eat with you, or could I sit here?’ I met a lot of people that way. I tell new people coming in to talk to everybody they see. You’re not going to remember their names, none of us do! You just say to them, ‘I forget your name again, what is it?’ How residents react in the first month decides how they are going to live here.”

An advocate at heart, Marion encourages her fellow residents to step out of their comfort zones and feel empowered to try something new. “Richard used to sit and play puzzles all day. Then I dragged him to exercise, even though he claimed he really doesn’t like it. But he’s there every morning now! I do those things all the time, some people just need a little more push to get started.”



Try everything a couple times. You can’t do them all – you can pick out what you like, but you’ve got to try them first.

THE GENUINE CARE AND SPECIAL BOND  
BETWEEN CONNIE AND JANET

# A HEARTFELT CONNECTION



*By Kim Connell, Corporate Director of Customer Experience & Hospitality*

At The Shores, a remarkable friendship has blossomed between two women, **Janet and Connie**, whose connection transcends the ordinary.

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**T**t The Shores, a remarkable friendship has blossomed between two women, Janet and Connie, whose connection transcends the ordinary. Their relationship is a testament to the profound impact of companionship and support, offering a glimpse into the warmth and joy that true friendship can bring.

Janet, a resident with limited family nearby, has found an unexpected ally in Connie, a dedicated respiratory therapist. Their friendship began with a simple act of care but quickly grew into something much deeper.

“I feel like I can call Connie if I have a problem or something on my mind,” Janet shares. “She wouldn’t mind if I disturbed her, and that is such a comfort to me.”

Connie, who has worked at The Shores for five years, sees Janet as more than just a resident.

“She’s truly a sweetheart,” Connie says with a smile. “People might not always see it right away, but she has the kindest heart and such a wonderful spirit.”

Their bond is marked by mutual respect, a shared sense of humor, and genuine care. Janet, known for her candidness, appreciates Connie’s straightforward nature. “She keeps me in line,” Janet laughs.

For Connie, the friendship is equally rewarding. “She’s taught me a lot with her wisdom and experiences. That’s a gift.”

The connection between Janet and Connie isn’t just about companionship; it’s rooted in compassion,

advocacy, and going the extra mile. When Connie asked Janet what she wanted most for her birthday, Janet mentioned that she’d love to relax with a cold drink. Connie delivered the special treat with care and a personal touch that made the moment unforgettable.

“It’s a heartstring for me,” Connie admits. “Her not having anybody around to rely upon, so I just want to be there for her.”

For Janet, having a friend like Connie means having someone who listens, understands, and cares. “It means a lot to me that she’s taken me under her wing,” she comments.

Connie treasures being able to make a meaningful difference. “Meeting residents and forming these bonds is a cherished aspect of senior living,” she notes.

Their friendship is a touching reminder of the power of human connection. It’s a story of two people who found each other and created a bond that continues to blossom, enriching both their lives. It beautifully illustrates that family isn’t just about blood, but about the people who care for us, support us, and make us feel at home. Ultimately, their relationship embodies the essence of abundant life. As Janet puts it, “Abundant life means taking care of your personal needs as well as your mental and social needs.”

Through their friendship, both women have found a sense of belonging and happiness, proving that an abundant life is measured not by material wealth but by the richness of the connections we nurture.

Their bond is marked by mutual respect, a shared sense of humor, and genuine care.

# THE BEST IS YET TO COME

By Jacquie Miller, Corporate Director of Sales & Marketing

The decision to move into Pitman Manor took Elaine Scheetz quite a bit of time to make. She admits to being nervous, but through it all, always kept her faith a priority. Elaine's first visit to Pitman Manor was in September 2016. At that time, she made the choice to move to a condo community not far away rather than to Pitman Manor. She kept in touch with the team at Pitman Manor, attending events, lectures and visiting friends who were already residents. Finally, in early 2025, after having some health issues, Elaine said, "God, what do you want me to do?" God made the path for her clear, and she moved into her apartment in March 2025. She never looked back, but looked forward to all the new opportunities to live an abundant life still ahead.

For those preparing for a similar transition, Elaine shares tips she's learned that might help new residents settle in and truly feel at home.



## 1. Say Yes to Invitations (Even If You're Unsure)

When I first arrived, I was invited to a coffee social. I almost didn't go because I didn't know anyone! But I pushed myself to attend, and I'm so glad I did. That one event introduced me to two people who are now good friends. The beauty of that first step was that I reconnected with a few women I had attended church with years before.

*Tip: Attend at least one event a week when you first move in. Whether it's bingo, fitness or a gardening group, showing up is the first step to feeling connected.*

## 2. Be Curious About Others

Everyone here has a story. I've met so many interesting people at Pitman Manor. Asking questions and showing interest in others is a wonderful way to build friendships.

*Tip: Start with simple questions like, "What brought you here?" or "Have you tried the art class yet?"*

## 3. Volunteer or Join a Committee

Getting involved gave me a sense of purpose. I joined in on most everything. I can now help new residents feel at ease—just like others did for me.

*Tip: Asking about ways to help is also a great way to meet people and feel useful.*

## 4. Keep Up With Life Outside of the Community

The church I attend, First Presbyterian Church of Pitman, continues to be a big part of my life. As a matter of fact, I was preparing to attend the Women's Circle luncheon at church. I needed a dessert and decided to ask Chef Rich for something to take with me. He had recently made a French Chocolate Silk pie that was absolutely delicious. I mentioned how good it was, and he offered to make me one! It was the hit of the luncheon! Everyone enjoyed it. Chef Rich also invited me into his kitchen for a tour. He went out of his way to make me feel special.

*Tip: Be sure to continue with the activities or volunteer organizations you are connected to outside of the community. It's ok to make new friends and keep connected to your current friends.*



## SIDE BY SIDE IN SUPPORT

If the stories of friendship and connection in this issue of engage! have inspired you, please consider making a gift in support of the UMC Foundation by using the enclosed envelope or visiting [SupportUMCF.org](http://SupportUMCF.org).

Your donation helps older adults continue to live abundant lives in the communities they call home, surrounded by the friends who feel like family.



## LEAVE US A REVIEW



Share your experience with our full-service communities and HomeWorks! Please note Google reviews require a Gmail account. Here's where you can leave feedback:

[umcommunities.org/leave-a-review-for-us/](http://umcommunities.org/leave-a-review-for-us/)



# 50 YEARS OF INNOVATION & HEART

*By Rebecca Roe, Director of Communications & Stewardship*

## CAROL GLEINIG CELEBRATES FIVE DECADES (AND COUNTING!) WITH UMC

When Carol Gleinig walked through the doors of United Methodist Communities' main office in Ocean Grove on May 5, 1975, she didn't imagine she would still be here five decades later. Originally hired as the organization's computer operator, she enthusiastically entered a world of magnetic-striped data cards and typewriters... a far cry from today's real-time communications and cloud-based software.

**W**e used three-striped magnetic cards back then," Carol recalled. "Each employee had their own card, and each General Ledger account had one as well." To balance the GL at the end of the month, one would manually load each card one at a time, a process that took a few hours. "At the end, we would get the monthly total, balance out to zero, and we would close," she continued. "If we were off, we would have to go back and see if we missed a card or if the system misread it. A far cry from today's ability to obtain that same trial balance and more in a matter of seconds!"

Carol filled many evolving roles over the years, including bookkeeping supervisor, systems administrator, business systems administrator, and now, business systems analyst. Her titles may have changed, but her dedication to growth and helping UMC keep up with and implement tech advancements remained constant. "Every system change brought something new to learn. With the start of SOS, Optimus, Vision/MyUnity, ADP, to where we are today with PCC. It was exciting to take on the challenge and watch each

system evolve for the better. I especially enjoyed training many of my UMC teammates through the ins and outs of each of the applications.” Carol also remembers prepping for the unknown with the Y2K scare as they waited for midnight, when they really celebrated because everything they had done up to that point was working as planned.

**Carol’s story is about more than just data and software, however.**

Though she’s the only UMC teammate to hit this significant 50-year milestone, others in the Finance Department aren’t too far behind her . Both Sue McCarthy and Barbara Sharp share 40-plus years with UMC, and the Finance department has combined years of service exceeding 235 years. “We really do mean it when we say, ‘it’s a great place to work.’” As a team, they have bonds built over decades of shared milestones, growth, and even grief. “We celebrated weddings and the births of our kids together. We watched our kids grow up, get married, and have children of their own. Over the years, we’ve walked together through many seasons of grief, bearing the loss of beloved family, friends, and coworkers,” she said.



That sense of community was especially powerful during the early years, when Carol and several coworkers were pregnant simultaneously and juggled their work and family commitments. She noted that her son, Travis, and Barbara’s son, Danny, were born just weeks apart. Learning that Travis grew up around Carol’s interest in software and spent many weekends playing on the computer at the Home Office while his mother worked on the latest system transition, it should come as no surprise that he has gone on to become UMC’s Chief Information Officer and Vice President of Innovation.

“Travis works hard for everything he’s achieved,” Carol said proudly. “From our early commutes together, when he was out in the field fixing systems, to now leading UMC as Chief Information Officer and Vice President of Innovation, his journey has been extraordinary. He remains grounded and compassionate, leads with a level head, quiet confidence, and cares for the people around him by lifting others up and keeping focused on meaningful change.” Carol says it’s been surreal and incredibly rewarding to see Travis driving the next chapter and that witnessing his growth, both personally and professionally, has been one of the proudest experiences of her life.

Carol laughed when asked what had changed the most over her 50 years with UMC, and pointed out she did start working before UMC used its first floppy disks. Basically, all technology has changed . As for what remains the same? “The heart of the company. The values. The teamwork. That’s probably why I’ve been here for 50 years! As for when I’ll retire? Well...I don’t have any plans for that at the moment.”

***From all your UMC teammates,  
happy 50th work anniversary, Carol!***

# A CULTURE OF PHILANTHROPY CELEBRATES 40 YEARS OF IMPACT

## A MESSAGE FROM THE UMC FOUNDATION



40th Anniversary Celebration Cruise

*By Rebecca Roe, Director of  
Communications & Stewardship*

**O**n May 29, the UMC Foundation (UMCF) welcomed friends, residents, teammates, and sponsors aboard the River Queen in Brielle, New Jersey, to celebrate an exciting milestone—40 years of advancing compassionate senior care.

The fundraiser, themed Anchored in Generosity, was both a joyful reflection on UMCF's four-decade legacy and a powerful show of support for the future of senior living at United Methodist Communities. Over \$50,000 was raised to support UMC's housing, programs, and healthcare services for older adults across New Jersey.

The evening featured a sunset sail, live music, and a short program honoring the Foundation's mission. Still, the undisputed highlight of the evening was a heartfelt speech by Rose and Eva, two residents of Covenant Place (Read their story on page 3). The ladies shared how the generosity of supporters has impacted their lives, and Rose's remarks about the friendships, purpose, and connections she's found in her community left a lasting impression on everyone aboard.

The UMCF team gives special thanks to the following Anchored in Generosity Visionary Tier sponsors, Caring Communities, EcoLab, Eklego, Hackensack Meridian Health, and Princeton Strategic Communications. Together, we are creating abundant life for older adults today and for generations to come!



Friends, sponsors, residents, and teammates gathered aboard the River Queen to celebrate the UMC Foundation's 40th anniversary and raise funds to support the future of senior care.





# OUR SACRED MISSION

## NAVIGATING GRIEF WITH PASTOR KIM WECHT

*By Jacquie Miller, Corporate Director of Sales & Marketing*

One aspect that sets UMC's CCRC and assisted living communities apart, even among other faith-based, nonprofit senior living providers, is our commitment to having full-time chaplains on staff.

**R**ooted in our Wesleyan heritage, this is an intentional decision that reflects our calling to care not only for seniors' physical needs, but also their mental and spiritual well-being.

This issue of *engage!* highlights the deep friendships that form and thrive in UMC communities...and as Queen Elizabeth II said, "Grief is the price we pay for love." By virtue of working in senior living, our chaplains often counsel residents and teammates dealing with the loss of close friends.

Pastor Kim Wecht, Director of Mission & Pastoral Care at Pitman Manor, explained her process. "When a resident passes away, I make a point to check in with those who were especially close to them to offer condolences and a listening ear," she said. Obituaries are posted in the lobby, and, after several Healthcare residents mentioned they'd like to see them, too, she set up a dedicated place in each healthcare neighborhood for everyone to stay informed.

Each quarter, Pastor Kim hosts a Remembrance Service to honor those who've recently passed. Families, residents, and teammates are invited to come together, reflect, and celebrate their loved ones. These gatherings are especially meaningful for those unable to attend outside funeral services. When a loss hits a specific neighborhood hard, Pastor Kim organizes smaller, informal gatherings just for those residents. Currently, she is planning a special service in Pitman's Cherry Blossom healthcare neighborhood after four recent resident passings. Pastor Kim also offers a monthly Grief Support Group, available for anyone who needs to talk, including teammates. As chaplain, she is here to help the community process their emotions and draw on their spiritual strength.

Having a full-time chaplain on-site means residents don't have to wait for outside help—they have someone right here who can be present in the moment, whether it's during a crisis or just when they need a hug or someone to talk to. Living in a community where friends pass away can be hard. With Pastor Kim walking alongside our residents and creating space for them to grieve and reflect, and even celebrate their friends' lives, Pitman Manor's seniors feel more connected and at peace.



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