



DIALOG

150th anniversary celebration presents legacy of service to thousands

BY THE TIME YOU READ THIS, 2018 WILL BE COMING TO A CLOSE.

And Diakon's 150th anniversary celebration will be concluding.

We are pleased, however, that the year-long celebration was a success! Many more people—in fact, thousands—now know about our long history and the many roots that led to today's Diakon.

Not only did the celebration raise needed funds for Diakon programs, but it also involved staff, donors, residents, clients, volunteers and other partners in a variety of events throughout 2018.

Among hallmarks of the celebration:

- Staff-recognition events occurred early in the year at all senior living communities and program sites.
- Congregations received appreciation certificates for their long-time partnerships. In addition, several synod assemblies included prayer petitions for Diakon and attendees viewed Diakon's 150th anniversary video.
- Rededication ceremonies were held at all Diakon Senior Living and housing communities as well as most program locations for Diakon Child, Family & Community Ministries. The events served as appreciation for residents and clients and focused on setting the stage for staff members for the next many years of service.
- The first of those local events, held at The Lutheran Home at Topton, included re-dedication of Old Main and the opening of the Helen N. Palmer Permanency Center for Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, following extensive renovation work on Old Main.
- A 150th anniversary campaign was launched to raise funds for the future.
- A history booklet, detailing the numerous organizations whose legacies Diakon continues, an anniversary video and a special website section were developed.
- A performance Oct. 21 by nationally recognized humorist Jeanne Robertson sold out the 1,262-seat Strand Theatre at the Appell Center for the Performing Arts in York, Pennsylvania.

"Please accept my appreciation for bringing good clean entertainment" in celebration of the anniversary, one attendee later wrote to Mark Pile, Diakon president/CEO. "It was also a privilege to be made aware of what Diakon has done for 150 years ... Diakon is bringing miracles to many."

While the yearlong birthday celebration comes to a close, its various events have positioned the organization for another 150 years of caring for our neighbors.

And it is good to have celebrated such an amazing ministry that has touched the lives of hundreds of thousands of people over the many decades.

The milestone of one-and-one-half centuries is rare. And comes but once.



Jeanne Robertson on stage at York, Pennsylvania, for Diakon's 150th anniversary performance.

Diakon recently received
a Keystone Award
from the



for its 150th anniversary
celebration planning
and implementation.

Our Mission

In response to God's love in Jesus Christ, Diakon will demonstrate God's command to love the neighbor through acts of service.

Diakon: Many Hands, guided by One Heart, transforming the lives of children, families and older adults. With programs ranging from adoption, foster care and at-risk youth services to counseling and comprehensive senior living services, Diakon annually helps thousands of people of all faiths through compassionate service, gracious hospitality and charitable care.

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The President's **DIALOG**



Mark T. Pile

Proud to continue a 150-year legacy

THE NARRATION OF DIAKON'S 150TH

anniversary video concludes with the following statement:

It is doubtful [today's Diakon] programs were ever on the minds of Philip Willard or Uriah Heilman ... [the founders of the Tressler Orphans Home and the Lutheran Orphans Home at Topton, respectively] ... but it is not doubtful that the spirit these founders embodied ... the spirit to serve others in response to God's love for us ... would continue in whatever services were created to meet society's needs. Nor is it doubtful these leaders would be proud of what grew from the seeds they planted so long ago.

These words, I believe, perfectly characterize the intent and focus of our now-concluding celebration of "150 years of caring for our neighbors."

The age was certainly different for the Revs. Willard and Heilman. At that point, few such ministries existed. Both men were charged not only with building a new church institution to aid children and youths in need—some of whom were completely alone in the world—but also to raise the funds necessary to launch those institutions and keep them operational.

They did amazing jobs with their tasks, although the effort would soon cost Heilman his life; he succumbed to pneumonia. Faced with such pressing needs as fundraising; acquiring or converting property; gathering the necessary supplies to educate, feed and cloth their young charges and tending to the accompanying administrative duties, they never gave thought to such concepts as behavioral health care, senior living accommodations, memory support, foster care and much more.

And that's certainly understandable! Society in the mid- and late 1800s was quite different from what it is today. Moreover, both leaders were focused on the needs of the times.

I believe that's a hallmark of Diakon's history—and one of the key reasons we are able to celebrate 150 years of service to people in need of all ages and in many circumstances. Diakon and the organizations whose legacies it continues have continually adapted to changes in society, creating new services to meet new needs.

What I'm particularly proud of is that we have often been at the forefront of such change. Both Topton and Tressler, for example, were among early advocates for developing senior services. And both homes for children made significant transitions into such services as group homes, foster care and adoption as society changed.

There is, as noted, no doubt both Philip Willard and Uriah Heilman would be amazed at how what they helped to create has grown and served hundreds of thousands of people over the years. They would, also as noted, undoubtedly be quite proud of what they fashioned.

As am I.

Mark T. Pile, MSHA, MSW
President/CEO

Lutheran Home at Topton resident serves in three wars

THERE ARE, OF COURSE, NO 150-YEAR-OLDS WHO might remember the origins of Diakon one-and-one-half centuries ago.

The organization's senior living communities, however, are home to numerous centenarians who can recount the early part of the last century.

One of them is G. Araminda Houp—known as Gerry—a resident of The Lutheran Home at Topton the last 10 years. She celebrated that 100-year milestone earlier this year, during Diakon's 150th anniversary celebration. Nearly 200 family members, friends and neighbors joined her to mark the event, organized by three of her nieces.

How does it feel to turn 100?

"Just like it did the day before you're 100," she says. "It's one day at a time, and then one day you're 100 if you live long enough. It's by the grace of God; it's nothing I did."

Gerry has fit a lot of living into the last century.

Born June 10, 1918, she was one of seven children, five girls and two boys. Growing up on the family's 60-acre farm near Oley, Pennsylvania, during the Great Depression, she notes that the family "didn't have any money."

So each summer, in addition to helping on the farm, Gerry would assist a neighboring family with whatever they needed. She earned \$5 a week by caring for their children, cleaning their house and doing light cooking. Gerry wanted to give the money to her mother, who desperately needed it, but her mother insisted she keep it.

Then, in 1927, a cyclone destroyed the family farm. Thankfully, no one was hurt but the family had to move in with relatives and neighbors while their home was restored. Gerry's father and a neighboring family completed most of the repairs.

Sadly, her father died in 1933 at the age of 41, after having fallen off a ladder while working in a cherry orchard. Gerry's mother, who never remarried, managed to keep the family and farm together. "I always admired her courage and strength," Gerry says today.

By the time Gerry graduated from Oley High School in 1936, she had saved enough money—a sum of \$300—to pay for nursing school at the Reading Hospital School of Nursing. She graduated in 1940.

"There weren't a lot of opportunities for women at the time," she says.

After working in local hospitals for two years, Gerry went with a friend to the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery Nursing Division. It was 1942 and the U.S. had just entered World War II. Gerry never intended to enlist but felt the call of duty and joined the Navy.

During the war everyone worked hours that would burn people out today, Gerry says. "Occasionally, we would work several weeks straight without a day off." However, all of her years on the farm had instilled within her a solid work ethic and she was prepared for the grueling hours. After the war ended, Gerry remained in the Navy, serving as a nurse in two more wars—the Korean and Vietnam. She moved a lot, serving at hospitals in Japan, Panama,

Maryland, Pennsylvania, Hawaii, Washington, D.C., Michigan, Florida, Virginia and North Carolina. "You went where they wanted you to go," she says.

"I did a lot of things I didn't think I'd have an opportunity to do," Gerry notes. For example, while serving on the island of Guam shortly after WW II, Gerry lived in Quonset huts, which she describes as "quite comfortable," and also survived an earthquake.

After 27 years of service to her country, Gerry retired in 1969 as a captain, one of the highest-ranking female military officers in the U.S. armed forces at the time. She returned to Berks County to be with her family and to help care for her ailing mother.

Recently, the Berks County Department of Veterans Affairs presented Gerry with a U.S. Naval Commemorative Medal for her outstanding military service.

Gerry never married, but has a large family and many friends from around the world. Today, she stays busy reading, knitting and keeping in touch with friends via the telephone and letters.

A resident of The Lutheran Home at Topton's Tower Court Apartments, she notes that "it's a nice community with friendly people and it's a comfort knowing that if I run out of money, I can stay here."



Gerry Houp

Scenes from a year of



Staff at Frey Village.



At the Jeanne Robertson meet-and-greet: Left to right, Joanne Judge of Stevens & Lee and Diakon's corporate counsel, Mary and Maury Bobst, Jr., a long-time Diakon board member.



Staff from Diakon Adoption & Foster Care.



Staff at Frey Village.



Participants gather for a group photo at a 150th anniversary event celebrated by Diakon Community Services in Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania.



Diakon Ministry Support staff celebrate the 150th anniversary.



Staff from Diakon Senior Living – Hagerstown.



Staff from Buffalo Valley Lutheran Village.

celebration of 150 years



Staff at Cumberland Crossings.



The Rev. Mark Wimmer, left, Diakon's vice president for church relations and ministry partnerships, and Mark Pile, president/CEO, right, with Charlotte Staton, a prominent supporter of the organization's focus on memory care, second from left, and Cindy Bonney, senior executive director, Luther Crest, Allentown, Pennsylvania.



Jeanne Robertson poses with staff from Morrison Community Living, Diakon's senior living dining and housekeeping partner, who managed food and related efforts for the meet-and-greet portion of the 150th anniversary performance by Robertson in York, Pennsylvania.



Mark Pile, Diakon president/CEO, spoke at local 150th anniversary celebration-rededications throughout the year. Here, he poses with Michael Christian, Manatawny Manor executive director, at the public event at the Pottstown senior living community.



A firefighter from the Scranton, Pennsylvania, Department of Fire poses with residents of Lutherwood during the senior housing community's 150th anniversary celebration. The event marked not only Diakon's anniversary, but also celebrated Lutherwood's 35th birthday and recognized staff members and community organizations including both police and fire departments for their response earlier this year when a severe storm extensively damaged Lutherwood's roof.



Carrie Wilt and her daughter, Kaylee.

Outdoor challenge helps participant overcome fear of heights

TRAIL-RUNNING ENTHUSIAST AND PENNSYLVANIA

Department of Environmental Protection employee Carrie Wilt first learned of Diakon while browsing a local calendar for 5K races.

The Diakon Outdoor Adventure Challenge immediately piqued her interest, prompting her to familiarize herself with the organization's wide range of programs and services upon registering for the September 2018 event.

Held annually on the Diakon Wilderness Center's wooded 170-acre campus in Cumberland County, Pennsylvania, the event allows participants to enjoy a competitive 5K trail run/walk plus use of the center's zip-line, Alpine Tower, Giant Swing, and high-ropes course, with all proceeds directly benefiting Diakon Youth Services.

This year's Outdoor Adventure Challenge simultaneously served to commemorate Diakon's 150th anniversary.

"Nothing thrills me more than children and young adults developing self-worth and realizing they have options," Wilt says. "I love the idea of contributing to an organization that helps at-risk youths, as it's something I'm personally passionate about. Others should do the same because an investment in youth is an investment in everyone's future."

Her 10-year-old daughter, Kaylee, who accompanied Wilt to this year's event, had convinced her mother that climbing their way through Diakon's high-ropes course would be fun.

However, by the time she approached the top of the cargo-net ladder, on the verge of tears, Wilt felt a sudden pang of panic. "I was flooded with a fear of heights I didn't realize I had."

Fortunately, with plenty of positive encouragement from a dedicated group of volunteers and a little spiritual guidance, she was able to face her fear and complete the course, ultimately fortifying her relationship with Kaylee, God and herself, she says.

"I had a moment where I decided to step out in faith and was immediately flooded with peace and courage from the Lord. After finishing, I found out my daughter had the same experience!" Wilt says. "In that moment, we felt so proud and bonded over the fact that we finished something so scary and seemingly impossible. She felt proud that she had pushed me to do it, and I was so grateful she did."

The experience had such a profound effect on Wilt that she is currently training for a rim-to-rim hike of the Grand Canyon in spring 2019.

**The 2019 Outdoor Adventure Challenge
will be held Sept. 14**

Healthy living workshop participants share common experiences

WHEN A BLOOD TEST REVEALED SHE WAS PRE-diabetic, Christina Benson decided she needed to educate herself about the disease.

For Joanne McGeary and Alan McGinty, their new education was about making heart-healthy choices.

And for Doris Collins, health-related learning was a way to ensure personal accountability.

Despite having completely different needs, each of them found what she was looking for in recent “Living a Healthy Life” and “Living with Diabetes” workshops offered by Diakon Community Services at varying Diakon senior living communities.

Funded by a grant from the Highmark Foundation, the six-week courses focus on creating chronic disease self-management education within senior living communities.

“I think what we shared in the class not only gave me a different perspective, but also it was encouraging to know there are other people going through the same kinds of things, what was working and what was challenging,” says Benson.

Developed for those ages 50 and older, the workshops are designed to help improve healthy behaviors and health status, while also potentially decreasing days spent in the hospital.

Paula Wall and Henriette Evans, who led a group at Cumberland Crossings, a Diakon Senior Living Community in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, covered topics such as using one’s mind, healthy eating, understanding emotions, breathing techniques, medications, working with health professionals, decision-making skills, physical activity, sleep, communication and weight management.

“I think being a leader helped in my life, too,” says Wall, who works as a nurse at Cumberland Crossings. “In our initial classes, I developed certain action plans that I still follow. They help keep you accountable.”

A Cumberland Crossings resident, Evans believes the action plans help participants realize they can be successful when setting personal health goals.

“In our group, we learned that setting unrealistic goals is not helpful,” she says. “Realistic works better—less stress, more reasonable and more feasible.”

While the course materials provided include a textbook, Wall and Evans used it more as a guideline than a directive for the program’s give-and-take-discussion format.

“We followed the curriculum, which is interesting and interactive, rather than just reading and lecturing,” Evans says.

More workshops, which are open to the public, are planned at various Diakon senior living communities in the following months. For more information, visit www.diakonseniorliving.org.



From left to right: Paula Wall, program leader, with participants, Joanne McGeary and Alan McGinty.



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