

CONNECTION

Q1 2026

A New Year Message from Our Executive Director

As we step into a new year, I want to pause and reflect on the incredible impact our Community Services team has made over the past twelve months. Every day our goal is to create moments of connection, comfort, and support for older adults throughout our communities. Whether it's a friendly smile at a Senior Center, meals delivered to a doorstep, a volunteer lending a helping hand, a counselor guiding someone through important Medicare decisions, an instructor leading a health and wellness session, or one of our Living & Learning classes that keeps people active and engaged—these moments are at the heart of what we do.

2025 brought plenty of change and new challenges, but our staff and volunteers met each one with flexibility, creativity, and heart. Senior Centers continued to be warm, welcoming places for connection. Our Meals on Wheels team worked tirelessly to keep older adults safe and nourished. PA MEDI counselors offered trusted guidance to help individuals navigate their Medicare choices. Our Health and Wellness program and our Living & Learning classes continued to grow, giving participants new skills, inspiration, and confidence. And our annual Expo provided a meaningful space for learning, resources, and connection all in one place.

As we look ahead to 2026, we're excited to continue building programs that support you, our participants, neighbors, and community members. We're committed to strengthening partnerships, expanding services where they're needed most, and keeping our Senior Centers, Meals on Wheels, Medicare counseling, wellness programs, Living & Learning classes strong and accessible.

Thank you for being part of our community. Your participation, your stories, and your presence are what make our programs meaningful. We look forward to serving you in the coming year and hope 2026 brings you health, connection, and many moments of joy.

Warmest wishes for a happy and healthy New Year.

Susan Long, Executive Director, Diakon Community Services

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Happy New Year from the Senior Center Staff!

Diakon Living & Learning: More Than Just an Exercise Class — It's Where Friendships Form

When people first sign up for a Diakon Living & Learning class, they often come looking for exercise, wellness, or a fun new activity. But what they end up finding is something even more meaningful: connection.

Yes, the classes improve balance, strength, mobility, and overall health—but the real magic happens in the friendships that form along the way. Each class becomes a small community, where people encourage one another, share stories, and celebrate the little victories that come with staying active and engaged.



Participants frequently say that the best part of joining isn't just about completing a workout. It's walking into a room where familiar faces light up when they arrive. It's laughing together during class, checking in on each other outside of it, and feeling part of something bigger.

In a world where many people are looking for meaningful connection, Diakon Living & Learning offers just that. It's a place where wellness and companionship meet. Where physical activity strengthens bodies, and shared experiences strengthen bonds.

More than an exercise class, it's a community. And for many, it becomes the highlight of their week.

Meals on Wheels of Schuylkill County

Meals on Wheels of Schuylkill County has served 79,311 frozen meals to 650 older adults in 2025 as of 11/30/2025. The weekly menu is created by a dietitian to meet the Pennsylvania Department of Aging, Aging Program Directive of $\frac{1}{3}$ of the daily recommended nutritional allowance for seniors. In addition to the frozen meals, 687 shelf stable boxes were delivered to 352 older adults in May 2025.

There will not be meal delivery on Monday, February 16, 2026 due to the President's Day holiday.

If you would like In Home Meals for yourself or someone else age sixty or older and a Schuylkill County resident, please call the Schuylkill County Office of Senior Services (OSS) at 800-832-3313 and ask for Information and Referral. If approved by OSS, Diakon Community Services/Meals on



Wheels of Schuylkill County will then manage meal delivery. Meals are delivered Monday, Wednesday, and Friday between the hours of 10 AM and 1 PM.

Operation Reach Out (ORO), our friendly phone call or telephone reassurance program, is available to all Meals on Wheels participants. A volunteer or staff member calls participants on Tuesdays and Thursdays to check on their wellbeing and overall meal delivery experience. 11,359 calls have been made to 253 participants in 2025 as of 11/30/2025. A participant of ORO will ideally receive up to five contacts in a week from Diakon Community Services.

LIVING & LEARNING

Drop-In Fitness Class Schedule

Our Living & Learning fitness classes offer more than just a workout—they provide a fun, welcoming space to move your body, meet new people, and feel your best.

What You Can Expect in Our Classes

- Helpful, encouraging instructors
- Participants of all skill levels
- Low-impact movements
- A welcoming, non-judgmental environment
- A great workout

What You Won't Find in Our Classes

- Drill-sergeant instructors
- Jumping or high-impact routines
- Intimidation
- Straining or pushing beyond comfort

No registration is needed. \$6 per class. Discounted punch cards: \$40 for eight classes (available at class)

Class Descriptions & Schedule

Zumba Gold

Instructor: Eileen Tarconish

A dance-based fitness class designed for active older adults, beginners, or anyone looking for a fun, lower-impact workout.

- Mondays & Thursdays:
9:30–10:30 am
Schuylkill Haven Center
340 Haven Street
- Tuesdays: 5–6 pm
Trinity Episcopal Church
201 Howard Ave., Pottsville
(rear entrance 2nd floor)
- Thursdays: 6–7 pm
23 Meadowbrook Center
Route 183, Schuylkill Haven

Functional Fitness

Instructor: Ronda Torres

Focuses on functional cardio and strength exercises designed to improve mobility and support daily living activities.

- Tuesdays: 9–10 am
Schuylkill Haven Center
340 Haven Street

Gentle Yoga

Instructor: Pat Schuettler

A soft, gentle yoga class featuring gentle postures, breathing techniques, guided meditation, and body-alignment instruction.

- Tuesdays: 6–7 pm
23 Meadowbrook Center
Route 183, Schuylkill Haven

Seated Yoga

Instructors: Prudence Griffin & Ronda Torres

Enjoy the full yoga experience in a seated format—great for beginners, older adults, individuals with limited mobility, pregnant women, or anyone looking for a gentler practice.

- Wednesdays: 10:30–11:30 am
Schuylkill Haven Center
340 Haven Street
- Fridays: 11 am–noon
Mahanoy City Center
138 West Centre Street

Line Dance

Instructor: Barry Long

A fun, energetic way to enjoy music, move your body, and meet new people—no partner or registration needed.

- Basic Steps: 6:15–6:30 pm
 - Lesson: 6:30–7:30 pm
 - Dancing: 7:30–9 pm
Walk-In Art Center
20 Parkway, 3rd Floor
Schuylkill Haven
- \$6 per class — punch cards cannot be used for line dancing.

Although these classes are geared toward the 50+ community, everyone is welcome.

Schedule and locations may change.

If attending for the first time, please call ahead: longs@diakon.org | 570-624-3018

Inclement Weather Policy

Weather-related cancellations will be posted on the Living & Learning Facebook page.

- Daytime classes are canceled if the school district where the class is held is closed due to road conditions.
- Evening classes are canceled if that school district cancels evening activities due to road conditions.

YOU WERE SEEN AT...



Halloween Fun!



Senior Expo



Veterans's Day



Fall Fun



Join us...America celebrates 250 years!

America celebrates 250 years in 2026. Pennsylvania is mostly forested as is Schuylkill County. Join "Hemlock" Hannah and "Porcupine Pat" as they provide a lively and informative show 'n tell of local trees and tree products. The program centers on the importance of how trees have helped to create our nation.

Tuesday, January 13

Pottsville Senior Community Center
201 N Centre St, Pottsville

Thursday, January 22

Schuylkill Haven Senior Community Center
340 Haven Street, Schuylkill Haven

Tuesday, January 27

Tremont Senior Community Center
139 Clay St, Tremont

Tuesday, February 3

Mahanoy City Senior Community Center
138 W Centre St, Mahanoy City



Staff Holiday Celebration

It was great to take a little time to slow down and enjoy the holiday season together. Sharing food, laughs, and good conversation was a nice change of pace during an especially busy time. Thanks to everyone who helped make it happen—and a big thank-you to our amazing staff for all you do every day.





Living a *Healthy Life*

A program for people with ongoing health conditions that may be causing fatigue, pain, anxiety, etc.

This program aims to help you:

- Feel better
- Learn tools to take charge of your health
- Get connected with others who have similar health issues

“Living a Healthy Life” is a 6-week workshop designed by Stanford University for people age 60+. Family members and caregivers are also invited.

Join us!

Space is limited. Register early – Call (570) 624-3017 by January 13.

DATES: Thursdays: January 15, 22, 29, February 5, 12, 19

TIME: 10 a.m. - 12:30 p.m

LOCATION: Trinity Lutheran Church
300 W Arch Street • Pottsville, PA 17901

There is no cost for this program.

SNOW DATES WILL BE ANNOUNCED IN CLASS.

 **Diakon**
COMMUNITY SERVICES
FOR SENIORS

   www.diakon.org/community-services



Make a difference as a PA MEDI Volunteer!

Make a difference in someone's life who is trying to navigate their Medicare journey. This is a rewarding way to give back to your community. All the training is free. If you like to talk to people and enjoy problem solving this type of volunteering may be a great fit for you! To learn more about volunteering opportunities please contact

Kathi Conahan-Baltzelle 570-624-3013 or conahan-baltzellek@diakon.org

Let me share this great opportunity with you!



Laughter is good for the heart and soul

Two older gentlemen, Fred and Sam, went to see a movie. Merely minutes into the movie, Sam heard Fred rustling around. It appeared that he was reaching under all of the seats. "What on earth are you doing, Fred?" asked Sam. Fred indignantly responded, "I had a caramel in my mouth and it dropped out. I'm trying to find it!"

Annoyed, Sam told him not to worry about it — they could get him another caramel later since that one was ruined by now. "But I've got to," said Fred, exasperated. "My teeth are in it!"



PA MEDI

**Are you getting ready to turn 65 years old?
Confused on how to
navigate your Medicare journey?**

Attend one of our Diakon Community Services PA
MEDI New to Medicare Information Sessions

Conducted by Renee Stefnic,
PA MEDI Coordinator for Schuylkill County.
Call to make your reservation at 570-624-3026

Monday	March 9, 2026	6 pm-7:30pm
Monday	June 8, 2026	6 pm-7:30pm
Tuesday	September 8, 2026	6 pm-7:30pm

All sessions are being held at our Pottsville location at
2020 W Norwegian St, Pottsville, PA 17901.

**We are looking for volunteers to assist us with
counseling at Diakon Community Services
Please call Renee @ 570-624-3026
for all your appointments
and if interested in joining our team**

KIM WOODFORD
SENIOR CENTER MANAGER

Chicken Soup and Sickness



Chicken soup has been a popular home remedy for the common cold since at least the 12th century. Eating chicken soup while you have a cold will not do you any harm, but it will not cure your cold.

Drinking warm liquids, such as soup, may give you relief from your symptoms for a short time. The steam from chicken soup may open up congested noses and throats. Soup also provides fluid, which thins mucus and helps prevent dehydration.

Chicken Noodle Soup

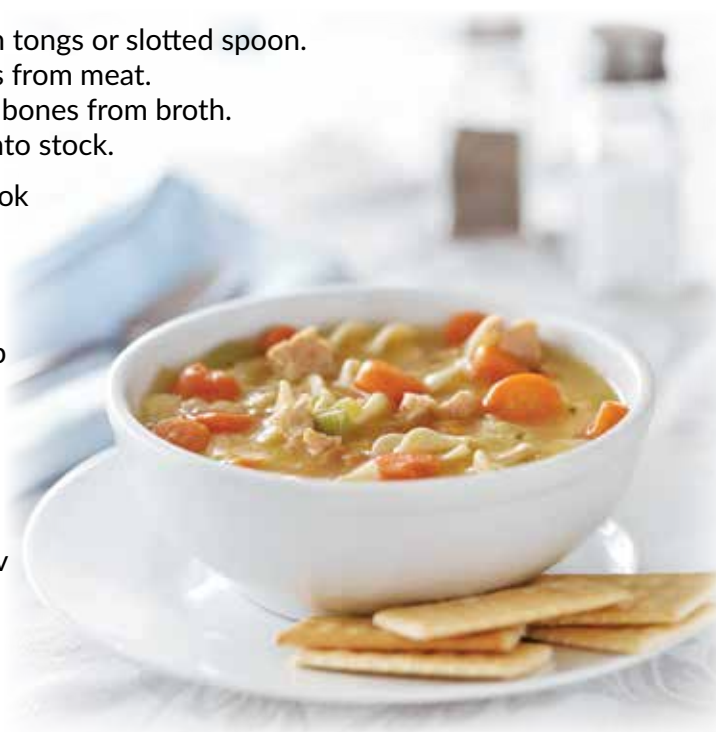
Ingredients

- 2 pounds chicken pieces, skin removed
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 cup celery, chopped
- 3 large carrots, thinly sliced
- 4 cups egg noodles, dry
- thyme or sage (optional)

Directions

1. Place chicken pieces in large pot. Cover completely with water. Cover, bring to boil, reduce heat, and simmer 2 to 3 hours.
2. Remove cooked chicken pieces from broth with tongs or slotted spoon. Cool 10 to 15 minutes before separating bones from meat. Break meat into bite-sized pieces. Remove any bones from broth. Put chicken meat, seasonings and vegetables into stock.
3. Bring broth to a boil, cover, reduce heat and cook about 15 to 20 minutes on medium heat until sliced carrots are crispy-tender.
4. Add noodles and boil uncovered for about 6 to 7 minutes, stirring occasionally to break up any noodles that might stick together
5. Refrigerate or freeze leftovers within 2 hours of cooking. If refrigerated, use within 2 days. When reheating, bring to a boil.

Sources: www.medlineplus.gov, www.myplate.gov



Craft Corner *AT THE CENTER*

Diamonds SPARKLE on the Christmas Tree in the Tremont Senior Community Center.

Senior Center members enjoyed creating and decorating their center tree with Diamond Art this year.

Pictured are Esther and Jan, Senior Center members.

Be creative with us...join us!



For the faith of it...

George Hoverocker knows that his church is a priority in his life. A member of St. John's Lutheran Church in Tremont since 1994, George cannot imagine not being involved in church activities.

George has been a Sunday school teacher for 11 years and Church Council President for 5 years.

George sets up for communion, is a greeter, lector and cleans the church.

He encourages all generations to get involved...he knows his life would not be the same without it.



One Step at a Time

Submitted by:
Maryellen Benulis, Orwigsburg Walking Club Volunteer Leader

Good intentions sometimes blossom into actions that can have a ripple effect. What began as an act of kindness, as well as a sizeable challenge, resulted in one woman finding a path to better well-being. It also inspired many around her to do better for themselves. In July of 2025, Rhonda Minchhoff decided to show her support for the American Cancer Society by committing to raise money through walking 2+ miles every day over the course of a month. This was quite an undertaking for the 67-year-old who, like many of us, faces hurdles such as arthritis, balance, and a knee replacement. Rhonda was not a stranger to walking as exercise. She had for months been a member of our Orwigsburg Indoor Walking Club sponsored by Diakon. We are a diverse group of over-50s who meet twice a week to walk and talk. We go at our own pace, take breathers when needed, and occasionally break into song and/or dance. When Rhonda began walking with us, she sometimes needed a cane-assist and a rest, but months of dedication changed that to the point where she was ready for the next challenge—signing up to walk for 31 days straight.

The summer was hot and humid; outdoor walk days were sometimes difficult, as were those when travel was involved. Rhonda was determined to find ways to achieve her objective...and so she did. She walked early in the mornings to beat our Pennsylvania heat, and she found paths in New York, Maryland, and Florida as she traveled. Rhonda held herself accountable by telling her family and friends of her goals. She joined an additional indoor group to fill the

weekdays and checked in/walked on weekends with a former boss. She also documented her walks on Facebook. The road was not always easy. There were times when encouragement was needed, but step by step, day by day, she accomplished her 31-day goal. Rhonda, however, did not stop there.

Along the way she noticed that she was feeling better, had more pep in her step, and started fitting nicely in her clothing. She was onto something, something very

good. What began as a challenge to herself, for a worthy cause, turned into something positively life altering. One month morphed into the next, and 31 days turned into 41...51...61...101...131...and beyond. Rhonda credits support from family and friends for keeping her accountable, but the truth is that she built that community by including her supporters in her journey and updating them from day to day. She celebrated her milestones and helped others by sharing what can be accomplished on your own and as part of a larger group.

Our Diakon Walking Club consists of members like Rhonda who encourage and support each other in ways large and small. We have people who like to walk quietly and those who like to chat. Some walk fast; some walk slow. It matters not. We are in it together for each of our greater good, for all of our greater good. The positivity is palpable in minor and major ways. We come from a variety of backgrounds and face a sundry of health challenges, but we are there, putting one foot in front of the other, trying to get stronger and travel a more healthful path. We fundamentally know that walking and socializing can improve our lives. The bonus comes when we stay open to learning what we can overcome and accomplish by simply walking at our own pace around a gymnasium. Rhonda is proof that we can attain great outcomes when we challenge ourselves and build a supportive community, one step at a time.

If you would like more information on the no-cost Diakon Walking Clubs and Exercise Clubs in the county, please call Jenny Wagner at 570-624-3017. Diakon Community Services manages Pennsylvania's Health & Wellness program under a contract with the Schuylkill County Office of Senior Services with funding by the PA Department of Aging.



Rhonda, in front, is supported by her fellow walkers on her Day 134



Orwigsburg Walking Club Members: Front Row: Dottie Fink, Mary Jane Reed, Joann Kocher, Rhonda Minchhoff (Day 134), Terry Freed, Nancy Snow; Second Row: Cindy Elison, Betty Kaye Fluke, Nancy Griffin, Annie Young; Third Row: Debbie Koch, Glenda Bright; Fourth Row: Maryellen Benulis (leader)

FUN FACT FROM Kelly Truscott

Kelly Truscott has been the Tremont Senior Center Manager since October 2020. Kelly loves working with our seniors who have become her second family. "We make a difference in each other's lives".

In her spare time, Kelly loves to crochet! Kelly's family will often comment, "If there is a crochet picture/pattern, Mom/Grandma can create it." Kelly also enjoys baking, especially with her grandchildren.



Join me in my kitchen!
SUE DOUGHERTY

FLUFF

INGREDIENTS:

16 oz. sour cream
8 oz. cool whip
3 oz. Jello
Container of fruit
Choose Jello flavor with fruit flavor.

DIRECTIONS:

Whisk sour cream, cool whip and Jello together.
Add fruit.
Refrigerate overnight.



UPCOMING EVENTS

- Tuesday, January 13 Senior Centers: America 250 - Trees!
Porcupine Pat and Hemlock Hannah
Pottsville Senior Community Center
201 N Centre St, Pottsville
- Thursday, January 22 Senior Centers: America 250 - Trees!
Schuylkill Haven Senior Community Center
340 Haven Street, Schuylkill Haven
- Tuesday, January 27 Senior Centers: America 250 - Trees!
Tremont Senior Community Center
139 Clay St, Tremont
- Tuesday, February 3 Senior Centers: America 250 -Trees!
Mahanoy City Senior Community Center
138 W Centre St, Mahanoy City
- Monday, February 16 Meals on Wheels: No Meal Delivery
- Monday, March 9 PA Medi: New to Medicare
6:00 PM to 7:30 PM
Must be pre-registered
2020 W Norwegian St, Pottsville

If you have questions about the above events,
please call the phone number listed above.

(Schuylkill County)
Health & Wellness
Jenny Wagner
570-624-3017

Living & Learning after 50
Susan Long
570-624-3018

(Schuylkill County)
Meals on Wheels:
Melissa Hepler and Sarah Kolbe
570-624-3010

(Schuylkill County)
PA Medi
Renee Stefnic
570-624-3026

(Schuylkill County)
Senior Centers
Debbie Herb
570-624-3016

Volunteers
Kathi Conahan-Baltzelle
570-624-3013

AVAILABLE JOBS

**Part Time
Center Assistant**
Senior Community Center
(Pottsville)

**For more information
and to apply, please visit
www.diakon.org/careers/**

Kick Off the New Year With Purpose - Join Our Meals on Wheels Volunteer Team!

Ready to start the new year doing something meaningful? We're looking for caring community members to help deliver meals and smiles to older adults in your community!

Volunteering is flexible, fun, and incredibly rewarding. Whether you can help once a week or once a month, every visit brightens someone's day—and yours, too!

Make 2026 the year you give back, get involved, and spread a little kindness.

Be part of the reason someone smiles this year!

