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Senior Living

The News-Gazette®



SENIOR LIVING

DANVILLE'S LIBERTY ESTATES

'Just keep going': Activity, attitude key to longevity for this foursome

By CAROL ROEHM
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DANVILLE — Four Danville residents are proving it is possible to enjoy a healthy, active lifestyle all the way into one's 70s, 80s and even 90s.

They all live independently at Liberty Estates, where they are anything but bored. The foursome spends their time playing competitive games, driving, exercising and counting thousands of steps each day.

A very fit and trim Betty Thomas said she strives to walk 10,000 steps a day.

"I've been trying to count steps ever since moving to Liberty Estates almost four years ago," said the 87-year-old, who was a secretary at bobby-pin maker Morris-Flamingo in Danville.

She favors taking the stairs to her apartment, eschewing the elevator — with one exception.

"Once in a while, I'll take the elevator when I have groceries in both hands," she conceded.

Walking all those steps has paid off for Thomas, who claims, "I eat whatever I want."

"I'll take a salad from the dining area and make myself a sandwich to go with it in my apartment," she said. "I have no health problems and don't take any medicine. I count myself lucky."

Sharp-witted Ronald Lindvahl, 94, admires Thomas' dedication to her health, playfully teasing that she must wear out her shoes quickly from all her walking.

"She's amazing; she has 14 pairs of shoes," he quipped, but Thomas interjected that Lindvahl certainly must be thinking of another resident's well-known shoe collection.

Ninety-year-old Norma Jenkins admitted that when she retired from teaching physical education at Oakwood High School, she thought she would finally rest and never exercise again.

Recovering from a back injury convinced her otherwise.



From left, residents Norma Jenkins, Ron Lindvahl, Betty Thomas and Sandy Schmit enjoy a game of Fast Track at Liberty Estates in Danville.

"I had a certain exercise I had to do for my back," she said, adding that she continues to do that particular exercise to strengthen her back.

Until just five years ago, Jenkins was an award-winning golfer.

"I don't have any health issues; the doctor can't believe it," she said. "I was an avid golfer until 2020. I have all my crystal pieces in my apartment for winning my flight."

In addition to exercising, Jenkins maintains a busy social calendar between participating in six different game groups and visiting with beloved former students who love to treat her to lunch and send her care packages with crossword puzzle books. She spent a total of 25 years at Westville, Catlin and Oakwood high schools, where she taught driver's education, coached girls' basketball and track and field, and was instrumental in forming Oakwood's first girls' bowling team.

"I had a hard life with caregiving," she reflected. "I decided, 'I'm going to start a new life' when I moved to Liberty Estates."

That enthusiasm spurred Jenkins to assemble a group of Euchre players, followed by gathering participants to play Mexican Train Dominoes and Shanghai Rummy.

"There are two tables of games we play every day but Friday," Jenkins said. "There are six games I play each week; it helps keep my mind sharp."

An avid game player herself, Sandy Schmit, 78, has no trouble honing her mental acuity since retiring from teaching. She taught for 34 years, including 17 at East Park Elementary, as well as second, third and fourth grades at Collett and Lincoln schools, all in Danville. She also taught swimming to second-graders at the Danville YMCA.

"I play seven games of cards a week, Mexican Train Dominoes, and I work puzzles," she said, adding, "I like to read Christian mysteries, and I go to church services."

She and Thomas also enjoy strolling on Liberty Estates' wooded walking path, which helps Schmit reach her goal of 13,000 steps a day.

Schmit's focus on fitness has resulted in a 61-pound weight loss.

"I take care of my mental as well as my physical well-being," she said.

Lindvahl, who taught junior high music and band for 37 years in Taylorville and played trumpet professionally for four decades, is happy to be the designated substitute anytime one of the games is short a player.

"I play Fast Track and Parcheesi," he said, adding that even at 94, he knows his way around a computer.

"I play bridge on the inter-

net," he said. "I think (being on a computer) is great as long as it works."

When Lindvahl isn't surfing the web, he might be found participating in an exercise class three days a week or walking the equivalent of a mile a day. He does admit he might "sneak a little coffee and a cookie" from the dining area on Saturday mornings.

Like Schmit, Lindvahl enjoys reading. He looks forward to the Danville Public Library's arrival every other week with new books and spends a half-hour each morning reading Scripture. He also facilitates Communion on Saturdays at Liberty Estates and sings in the choir at St. James United Methodist Church.

"I still play in the church band once a month," he added. "I've played many, many years."

"Junior year of high school, I joined a musician's union in 1948 and played professionally for 40 years," he said.

Over the years, Lindvahl has performed in a band while serving in the Army, at the Illinois State Fair, for several governors and even at a governor's daughter's wedding. He also has performed with local favorites such as Doc Ashton and the Root Canals and the Danville Municipal Band in the past.

All four relish their freedom of still being able to hit the road and drive to nearby stores, with Schmit even crossing the state line.

"I drive over to Covington (Indiana) for my great-grandkids' ballgames," she said.

Thomas added, "I hate the thought of giving up driving."

The secret to living a healthy, active life well into one's golden years is actually quite easy, according to the foursome.

"Just keep going," Thomas said. "Don't sit and feel sorry for yourself."

Schmit agreed. "Keep active." "Have a good, positive attitude," Lindvahl added.

Jenkins simply said, "Smile."

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SENIOR LIVING

THE WINDSOR OF SAVOY

YEEHAW!

Well-loved Western Night a real hootenanny

By CAROL ROEHM
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SAVOY — The residents of The Windsor of Savoy and Windsor Court saddle up every year to experience the Wild West — complete with Western wear, saloon and chuckwagon supper — during the facility's annual Western Night.

The event, which started shortly after the facility opened in the late 1990s, is the most popular of the three main parties planned each year. The other two are an aloha luau that features a flame-thrower in the spring and a holiday gala in the winter.

"The facility likes to have events and activities so the families of the residents can join them," said Jami Bowles, The Windsor of Savoy's life-enrichment manager.

Vice President of Operations Nancy Mella-Oliver expected 170 independent-living residents and 54 assisted-living residents to attend this year's Western Night on Sept. 5.

"Residents can invite up to two guests each, and we usually have a wide variety of guests," she said. "Great-grandkids love the decorations."

"Our bigger events are a great reason for our residents to get excited and look forward to something that makes them happy," Mella-Oliver added. "If they're happy, then I've done my job."

Bowles has planned and lined up the entertainment for Western Night for the last eight years.

Several days before the big night, Bowles begins decorating both the independent-living area and the adjoining Windsor Court, where assisted living is located.

"We decorate all week," she said. "The whole place is decorated with bandannas, rustic things and barrels."

Bowles also builds two displays that resemble scenes from the Old West — a general store in the main Savoy Room and a jail in the Windsor Court wing.

"It brings back memories of the old days," she said, adding, "The jail door opens, and they can get their picture taken in jail."

Two large Western-themed backdrops of cowboy boots and whiskey barrels

provide additional photo opportunities in the independent-living area.

"When they have their pictures taken, some of them wear cowboy boots and cowboy hats, and last year, someone wore a Native American leather outfit with fringe," she said.

Dressing up for the occasion is a large part of Western Night.

"They're so excited," Mella-Oliver said. "They've been ordering outfits, and people are pulling out their cowboy hats. Everybody dresses up, even if it's just a bandanna."

One resident, Denny Coyle, decided to order a few extra items for Mella-Oliver when he bought his cowboy hat and Western shirt online.

"I love living here, and one day at breakfast, I was thinking, 'What can we do for Nancy?'" he said. "So, I bought her a stick horse named Buttercup because that was Dale Evans' horse, a pink and rhinestone cowgirl hat because she's the queen, and whip because she's a leader."

Resident Gail Orsted dressed the part of a pioneer woman, donning a gingham dress, bonnet and apron.

"I was going to have a cowboy hat, but my head is too small," she lamented.

Orsted decided to borrow the bonnet that had been hanging up as a decoration.

"I've been coming to this for seven years, and my favorite part is the decorations," she said. "It's always a fun night."

Becky Hansen joined her friend Orsted as a guest and wore her father's Stetson for the occasion.

"I have my dad's Stetson," she said. "He loved it."

This year's Western Night started earlier in the day in Windsor Court with a visit by two miniature horses wearing hats and bandannas from Heartland Mini Hoofs, followed by a showing of the 1939 Roy Rogers flick "Frontier Pony Express."

"It makes it an all-day event," Bowles said of activities leading up to Western Night.

The evening festivities kicked off when Lynne Whiteman, executive chef and bartender for more than 20 years, opened the saloon in The Windsor of Savoy's Illini Lounge, where she served up



ABOVE: Windsor of Savoy resident Gail Orsted, left, and friend Becky Hansen stop by the General Store, one of several displays and backdrops reminiscent of the Old West scattered around the facility during Western Night. **BELOW LEFT:** Nancy Mella-Oliver, vice president of operations, chats with resident Denny Coyle at the saloon. **BELOW RIGHT:** Karen Peck ended up in the hoosegow in Windsor Court.



Cactus Cooler punch and margaritas.

"We usually have a specialty drink to go with the theme, but we have found people really enjoy margaritas on Western Night — both alcoholic and non-alcoholic," Mella-Oliver said. "They can then mosey on over to their table and have a fabulous buffet."

Whiteman is the culinary genius behind the creative menus for the theme nights.

"I try to do a theme night once or twice a month," she said. "Most of my cooks have been here with me 20 years."

The Western Night menu included appropriately named chow such as Pioneer Fruit Salad, Fireside Baked Beans with Weenies, Texas Sheet Cake and Cowboy Caviar, which is black beans, pinto beans,

corn, onions and dressing.

Live entertainment is a highlight of the larger events, and Western Night was no exception.

The Acoustic Sounds of Dan Basham performed in Windsor Court followed by the Philo Country Opry Show on the patio.

"I try to get the best entertainment I can find," Bowles said.

The staff at The Windsor of Savoy enjoys creating all the theme nights and special events for the residents.

"When I started, I didn't think I was going to stay long, but I love it here, and I love the residents," Whiteman said. "They're like your grandparents. You hear about their kids and grandkids."

Bowles agreed: "It's like we all have 200 grandparents living here."

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Lila Bain/The News-Gazette

Earlier this month, Synergy HomeCare celebrated a sixth-straight No. 1 finish in the in-home care category in The News-Gazette People's Choice Awards.

The secrets behind Synergy HomeCare's success

In the ever-evolving world of home care, few names stand out like Synergy HomeCare. With a reputation built on trust, compassion and community, Synergy has become a standard of excellence in the industry.

What sets them apart? Here are the top five secrets to their continued success:

1. Locally owned and deeply rooted in the community

One of Synergy HomeCare's greatest strengths lies in its local ownership. Synergy is owned and operated by individuals who live in and care about the communities they serve.

This local connection fosters a deep understanding of the unique needs of the clients and their families. It also allows Synergy to be actively involved in community events, partnerships and outreach programs — building trust and relationships that go far beyond caregiving.

2. Hiring compassionate caregivers, promoting internal growth

They focus on a dual commitment to excellence in caregiving and employee development. It emphasizes the importance of hiring individuals who embody compassion and dedication to personalized care, while also nurturing talent within the organization to encourage career growth and long-term success.

3. 24/7 availability — because care doesn't take a day off

Life is unpredictable, and Synergy HomeCare understands that. That's why their staff is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Whether it's a late-night emergency,

a holiday need or a sudden change in a client's condition, Synergy is always just a phone call away.

This round-the-clock availability provides peace of mind to families and ensures that clients are never left without support when they need it most.

4. Enriching lives through meaningful engagement

Synergy doesn't just focus on physical care — they believe in enriching the whole person. Caregivers work closely with clients to keep them engaged in the activities they love, whether it's gardening, painting, playing music or simply enjoying a walk in the park.

These personalized experiences help maintain a sense of purpose, joy and independence, which are essential to overall well-being.

5. Educating the public about who they are and what they do

A key part to Synergy's success is their dedication to community education and outreach. Through workshops, seminars and public events, they continually inform families, healthcare professionals and the broader community about the services they offer and the value of home care.

This transparency builds trust and helps families make informed decisions about their loved ones' care.



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Participants listen to a presenter on a garden walk during a previous Active Aging Week. This year's event runs Oct. 6-12 at various locations throughout Champaign-Urbana.

Provided



JANET SOESBE: AGE-FRIENDLY CHAMPAIGN-URBANA

Active Aging Week returns in October



of issues faced by older adults in our area, as we strive to create a community that is livable and safe for all.

To achieve this, we will work with, not for, older adults; prioritize diversity, equity and inclusion; be transparent; collaborate; celebrate aging; focus on community; and promote quality of life.

The group has chosen Active Aging Week as a local feature to highlight and strengthen this vision. The goals of the nationwide week dovetail nicely with our group's work in aging within Champaign-Urbana.

Active Aging Week was launched by the International Council on Active Aging in 2003, making this the 23rd anniversary of a week full of fun, education and wellness activities for those 50 and older all across the country.

Active Aging Week was created to promote the benefits of healthy aging and lifestyles. During this week, organizations throughout the nation will offer free wellness activities and exercise programs for older adults to participate in, with the goal of showcasing their age-friendly wellness programs and promoting a positive message of aging.

In 2024, Champaign-Urbana's Active Aging Week had 48 different sites offering fantastic and enriching activities, including pickleball, poetry reading, exercise, cooking demonstrations, adult crafting/peace post painting, lectures or workshops on brain health, history, Medicare, downsizing, dementia care, Excel, a bird walk, a tap dance jam, one volunteer opportunity and open houses at PACE Inc. and the McKechnie LIFE Home. As you can see, we had something for everyone to celebrate aging in Champaign-Urbana!

A group of dedicated professionals are in the planning phase right now for this year's Active Aging Week in early October, and we look forward to everything they will have to offer. While details are not finalized yet, the whole schedule will be available at urbanaparks.org/age-friendly-programs.

Here are some exciting things we are looking forward to at this year's event, which runs Oct. 6-12:

- Karaoke at the Urbana Park District
- Financial-wellness presentation from CIBM Bank.
- Glo Bingo at Villas of Holly Brook in Savoy.
- Open Houses at both the McKechnie LIFE Home and PACE Inc.
- Punch-needle embroidery class from Brittney Heyen through Parkland College Community Education.
- "Brain fitness" activities —

mental exercises, games, memory — with Minds in Motion.

→ Ukulele Jam special-request concert: "Old School Night."

→ Beginning genealogy at the Urbana Free Library.

→ Sports like pickleball and basketball at the Urbana Park District and fitness classes like chair exercise at the Champaign Park District.

As of press time, the following agencies have already committed to offering a wide variety of activities focusing on healthy living, recreation, education, art and community engagement:

- Champaign Park District
- Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District
- ClarkLindsey
- Family Service
- McKechnie LIFE Home
- Minds in Motion
- OLLI at Illinois — Lifelong Learning Community
- PACE
- Parkland Community Education
- Synergy Home Care
- The Urbana Free Library
- Urbana Park District
- Villas of Holly Brook

For a more complete listing of this year's activities, please follow Age-Friendly Champaign-Urbana's Facebook page (@AgeFriendlyChambana) as we get closer to the celebration.

Janet Soesbe is community program manager for the Urbana Park District and a member of the steering community of Age-Friendly Champaign-Urbana.

PAUL BARRETT: LAGNIAPPE

As Uncle Jack would say, age is a state of mind



I have a great deal of admiration and respect for senior citizens. I've always had several friends who were considerably older. I just seem to have more of an affinity for folks with a lot of candles on their cakes than those who have a handful.

It wasn't until the other day, when Vice President of News Jim Rossow asked me to write a senior-citizen column, that I realized I was now officially in that category. At 73 years old and reasonably able-bodied, I guess it never really sunk in. Even after I signed up for Medicare, I didn't think of myself as being part of a new group.

And I think it all goes back to spending lots of time with my Uncle Jack. He was about 25 years older and was always working on a project. I'm the same way; I always have a project or two to dabble with.

Jack had a group of same-age friends whose hobby was to cut firewood not only for their own needs, but also for those who couldn't do it for themselves. Over time, Jack was the guy people would approach about a widow or someone with a disability that prevented them from using their fireplaces or wood stoves because handling firewood was just too hard.

Or sometimes he'd find out about a tree that had fallen near someone's house, or one that needed to come down for safety reasons. He'd tell the group, and a Saturday "wood cutting day" would be planned. For the last several years of his life, I was the youngest member

of the group.

The first year I joined, I wasn't allowed to use a chainsaw. I was the official "top puller" — the person who pulled limbs out of the way while the rest of the group trimmed up trees once they hit the ground. The limbs would go into a pile to burn later, and some would be used for the requisite campfire the guys would sit around and cook lunch on.

At one lunch gathering while cooking our hot dogs on a stick, I asked Jack what it felt like to be 60 years old. He said: "Other than a few ailments and stiffness, I feel like I did when I was 30. In fact, in spite of those things, my mind feels the same. I observe things the same, I can solve problems the same way, and I have virtually the same likes and dislikes. Age is very much a state of mind."

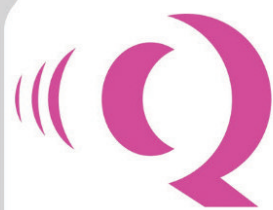
My thought as a 34-year-old was, "No way." And now here I am, 13 years older than Jack was at the time, and his words ringing a resounding chorus in my head. He was so right.

I've outlived my father now by 11 years. I graduated from high school over 55 years ago. I meet people older than I am who are more active than me, and people younger who want to be on a couch all day with a remote control and a bag of chips.

It is a state of mind, as Uncle Jack tried to tell me. Live to be old, work to feel young. Maybe that will be my new mantra.

There you go, Jim — my version of getting old.

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