

# REFLECTIONS

VOLUME 46 NUMBER 2 | SUMMER 2024 | SERVICE



WILLOW BROOK CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

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**“ EVERYBODY CAN BE GREAT...BECAUSE ANYBODY CAN SERVE. YOU DON'T HAVE TO HAVE A COLLEGE DEGREE TO SERVE. YOU DON'T HAVE TO MAKE YOUR SUBJECT AND VERB AGREE TO SERVE. YOU ONLY NEED A HEART FULL OF GRACE. A SOUL GENERATED BY LOVE. ”** -DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

### LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Gentle Readers,

To serve is to put others first. In a time when we are so focused on self-reliance, the concept of putting others first can feel uncomfortable. Whether driven by faith, duty, a sense of justice, or something else, how you choose to serve in this world makes a difference. While service may not be our life's work, it should be the work of our lives.

Service is a part of the very fabric of Willow Brook. In the organization's early years, our founders would work full-time jobs by day and devote their evenings and weekends to nurturing the dream that became Willow Brook. They did not do it for a salary or for recognition, but because they believed they were called to serve.

The beauty of service is that anyone can do it. There are always ways to uplift others, as this issue gives witness to so beautifully. May you be inspired to carry on, to comfort others, and to break down barriers. And may Love be your guide.

Cover Photo: Summer Tiger Lily flower on Willow Brook at Delaware Run's campus.

Photo by Christina Dresdow

## WILLOW BROOK CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

*Three campuses • Not-for-profit • Churches of Christ*

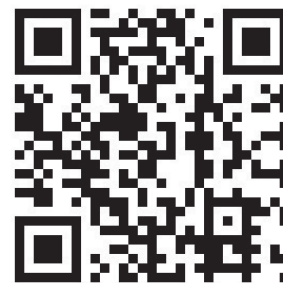
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Independent Living • Skilled Rehab  
Transitional Living • Respite  
Assisted Living • Memory Care  
Long-Term Care • Adult Day Program

Reflections is published quarterly by  
Willow Brook Christian Communities  
Cathy Courtice, Editor  
Christina Dresdow, Designer



[willow-brook.org](http://willow-brook.org)



# FIRESIDE CHATS WITH CEO TROY MCKNIGHT



Troy McKnight, CEO of Willow Brook Christian Communities.

## IN GIVING, WE RECEIVE

Service has been, and continues to be, a centerpiece of my life. Starting at an early age, my family was regularly involved in service to members of our church family, our neighbors, and the community. This instilled in me deep-rooted values to put others' needs before mine. Living these values has generously blessed me over the years, shaping my path. Ultimately, I was led to this senior retirement living career that I love so much.

Service is not just a duty but a privilege, offering us a chance to step outside ourselves and contribute to something greater. I've enjoyed being a part of a service club, Rotary International, for many years. I honestly just stumbled into it as I began my career in senior living. My first visit, they gave me a coin with the Rotary mantra inscribed on it, 'Service Above Self'. I knew this was going to be a good fit. This mantra reminds us that true fulfillment comes not from what we acquire, but from what we give.

It is also a reminder that real transformation happens through action; through the love-motivated service that breaks the chains of self-centeredness. Each act of kindness, no matter how small, has the potential to create ripples of positive change. By investing our time and energy into helping others, we not only address immediate needs, but contribute to far-reaching effects that can last for generations.

Service is a reflection of Jesus's love, a tangible expression that can dispel the shadows of loneliness and bring the warmth of God's presence into the lives of those around us. In serving, we find a deeper connection to our community and a profound sense of purpose. Let's embrace the call to serve, for in giving, we receive; in loving, we are loved; and in serving, we find the true essence of being. ❤️

## GIFT OF LOVE AWARD RECIPIENTS 2024

The Gift of Love Award is presented to volunteers who have actively invested generous time and effort for the benefit of our Willow Brook residents during the past year. This year our award was presented to four volunteers, and we are delighted to share them with you.



Willow Brook at Delaware Run's Gift of Love co-recipients for 2024: independent resident Tracy McKirgan and volunteer Karen Fisher-Guilkey pictured with CEO Troy McKnight, assisted living director Amy Santarelli, and Karen's therapy dog Loki.



The Gift of Love 2024 co-recipients for Willow Brook Christian Village are resident volunteers Charleen and Bill Blum pictured with CEO Troy McKnight and Village director of independent living, Marie McCreary.

# SHARED HUMANITY



A late 1990s seminary internship at a Nashville work camp made a big impression on Willow Brook Chaplain Adam Metz. The work camp mobilized volunteers, like Metz, to paint houses for people who otherwise could not afford it, in neighborhoods that had seen better days. The work camp took ministry to the people; it was about *doing*. Metz never forgot the sense of connection he felt when he put the gospel into action.

Fast forward to Metz's 2003 call to Alum Creek Church of Christ in Lewis Center, Ohio. He sensed a need for the kind of "take it to the streets" ministry he encountered in Nashville and decided to create a weeklong work

camp right in his own backyard. In 2005, the Central Ohio Work Camp (COWC) debuted with 25 volunteers, who painted three houses in Delaware, Ohio.

Two other churches, the Reynoldsburg Church of Christ and the Heyl Road Church of Christ in Wooster, Ohio joined with Metz's church to provide the seed money and coordination to get the camp off the ground. Churches remain COWC's main funding source, along with the work camp participants themselves who pay a fee to offset lodging and meals during the week. To identify eligible homes in need of exterior painting, Metz concentrates his efforts on inner city Columbus. He partners with multiple organizations, courts, and

Photo submitted by Adam Metz





Willow Brook Chaplain Adam Metz (R) with a group of teens from Central Ohio Work Camp after completing a project. The other photos show them hard at work on projects.



Photo submitted by Adam Metz

Columbus city offices and reaches out to area churches to see if they have parishioners in need.

Metz's small but mighty work camp welcomed about 50 volunteers this summer, many of them youth ranging in age from 12-18 years old. "This is an opportunity to take suburban kids into urban areas, places that are quite different from where they live. It is also a way to make the unknown known, in the sense that judgments about poverty change when you meet actual people, and put a human face on societal ills," Metz says. "The folks who live in the homes we paint also have their own judgments about kids today and are delighted to encounter young people who work hard and care about the world around them. Also, many of [the homeowners] are lonely and connecting daily with others for this one week out of the year really brings them joy."

At one time, Metz could count on 150

volunteers and participation from 20-25 different churches, but times have changed, especially post-Covid. Not only is it hard to find volunteers, it is difficult to get those volunteers to take a week off work and to schedule around summer obligations, plans, and family vacations.

After 20 years, the COWC is at a crossroads. What does the future look like? Metz is not sure. Is it time

for a different ministry? These are the questions he and his church will be pondering in the months ahead. "Over the decades, I have developed such a love for the city and have had the privilege of meeting so many interesting people," he says, "but what I would miss the most are the priceless moments of shared humanity, and we need those moments now more than ever." ❤️



Photo submitted by Adam Metz

# CALLED TO SERVE



Aerial view of Willow Brook Christian Village server Trishna Barnhill's missionary group.

This summer, 18-year-old Willow Brook Christian Village server Trishna Barnhill took a life-changing overseas mission trip to Romania and Ukraine. "I thought my call was to healthcare, but God had a missionary in mind," Barnhill says. Her mission site was a camp in Romania that served children, many of them orphans, and many from nearby Ukraine. Trishna and her group from Grace Powell Church set up camps, built a playground, and created an obstacle course. The mission site provided food for the children and shower facilities. "Going on this mission trip helped me develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of other cultures and a greater sense of empathy and compassion for those in need," Trishna says. The startling contrast between the abundance in her own country compared with what she was seeing in another part of the world gave her pause. She especially noticed the difference with regard to food. "The kids at the camp ate everything on their plate, good or bad, because food is scarce in Ukraine. In America, we throw away food we do not like, or we complain of being too full," she says.



Photo submitted by Trishna Barnhill

Willow Brook Christian Village server Trishna Barnhill, and one of the young boys she served as a missionary in Romania.

Trishna says she decided to go on this mission trip because she has always had a heart for orphans and wanted to share good news. "The kids I met were dealing with war, loss of parents and loved ones, and human rights violations on top of poverty, lack of mental health care and education resources, and crime. Being with kids who face challenges like this every day pushes me to do things with a grateful heart," Trishna says.

As inspiration, Trishna cites 1 Peter 4:10-11: "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen." ❤️



Our prayer shawl/quilt group of residents at Willow Brook at Delaware Run, showcasing some of their work. Below (L) two of our original prayer shawl group members, sisters, Peg Simone and Gert Torry.

Photo by Christina Dresdow

# WRAPPED IN A PRAYER

In 2006, the first residents moved into the twin-single houses at Willow Brook at Delaware Run, before the main building had finished construction. Strong friendships and bonds of community were formed among those early residents.

When one of the early residents, Donna Larson, was diagnosed with cancer, her friends wanted to show support and love for her as she underwent treatments. An idea

formed for a knitted shawl, and each resident at the time had the opportunity to add at least one stitch to the project – men and women – and even those who had never knitted before were encouraged to take part. After that, more shawls were made and given to others experiencing health concerns. And as the campus grew with the main building's completion, so too, did this project.

In fact, it soon expanded into making prayer quilts as well as shawls, which opened the way for more people to be involved. An unofficial committee was formed to document the gifts and a set of guidelines were put in place. "It enriches your life by helping and serving other people. It's so meaningful to the people we create these for," explains one of the committee members.

When a quilt or shawl is delivered, it is not just left at the door or given hastily. Rather, the member/s present the gift with a visit and a listening ear— quality time is spent with the recipient, and they

are given the opportunity to share as much or as little as they would like about how they are feeling or anything they may want to talk about. "When they're presented with a quilt or shawl, and they wrap it around themselves they can feel something that helps them know they are not alone, and that we are praying for them. It's often very emotional to present it, but so meaningful," explains another committee member who has delivered many quilts/shawls over the years. Now the group has expanded to become a craft group in conjunction with the quilters and knitters – they form bonds of friendship in creating. And they create other projects for the community as well, including one of their newest projects: sensory blankets, specifically for those in our memory care. Willing hands knit and quilt, using the resources available to them. Others have supplied fabrics, yarn, and encouragement. Caring people have kept records and presented the gifts.

And the story continues. 



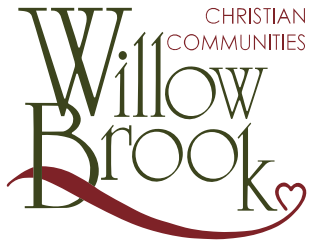
Photo by Mary Krider

# REFLECTIONS

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Photo by Christina Dresdow

Delaware, Ohio's first responders have generously given of their time to come to our early morning send-offs for our veterans going on Honor Flight. But not only that, they have given an escort (flashing lights and all) to the county line (and in some cases all the way to the Columbus airport), which means so much to our veterans and their spouses. In an effort to give back to our first responders and to say thank you for doing this, as well as for all their hard work in keeping us all safe, our veterans who have participated in Honor Flight (both from Delaware Run and the Village) and our Willow Brook teammates hosted a First Responders Breakfast at Willow Brook at Delaware Run.

