

REFLECTIONS

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WILLOW BROOK CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Gentle readers,

You may have noticed the refreshed design for *Reflections*. We think this cleaner, more streamlined look is easier to read, and more pleasing to the eye. While we will still be publishing quarterly, you will notice some changes:

The cover: Our cover will feature a photo, not text. We love the simplicity! You will now find the contents page on the inside front cover.

Fireside Chats with Troy: With Larry's retirement, you will now have the chance to get acquainted with CEO Troy McKnight in *Fireside Chats with Troy*, which replaces Larry's Essay.

Theme: To bring more uniformity to our pages, each of our seasonal editions will have a theme. This issue, Spring 2023, we will be exploring *Journeys*. Like a one-word prayer, we hope that you will consider what *journeys* means, or has meant, in your own life.

As always, your feedback is appreciated! Let us know what you think of our refresh at editor@willow-brook.org. Happy reading, and we will see you in the summer!

Cover Photo: Budding spring flowers on the campus of Willow Brook at Delaware Run. Photo by Christina Dresdow.

WILLOW BROOK CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

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

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Columbus, Ohio 43235

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Willow Brook Christian Village

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Delaware, Ohio 43015

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Willow Brook at Delaware Run

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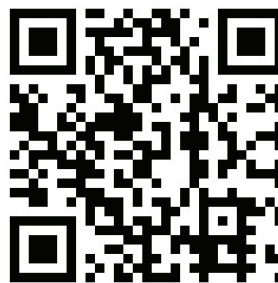
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Christina Dresdow, Designer



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FIRESIDE CHATS WITH CEO TROY MCKNIGHT

Photo by Christina Dresdow

Troy McKnight is excited to have begun his journey as CEO of Willow Brook Christian Communities.

A JOURNEY OF FAITH

I never thought I'd move from Texas. I met my wife in the Lone Star State, had all three of my children there, grew in my faith and gained a church family, embarked on new careers, and eventually learned to survive the heat. But then one day I received a call... this time a phone call. I was presented with the opportunity to lead a Christian senior living ministry called Willow Brook... in OHIO. Again, I never thought I'd leave Texas, so my first response was "I doubt it." But this one phone call turned into two, three, four, and then a face-to-face interview. In the midst of these communications, another 'call' was taking place—the one that only comes from God. This was a gentle tap on the shoulder encouraging me to be still, listen closely to the sermon, read the scripture, pray, and finally, to walk through the open door. It's entirely intentional when God calls us. He prepares us each day to be his vessel of love, and over time guides us to His Calling.

My first career God-nudge, though I didn't know it then, was many years in the making. A door opened and in faith,

I stepped through it. That leap of faith quickly led to my first position in senior living sales and marketing. I knew I had found a home and what I loved to do. My job was no longer "work," just journeying alongside people in a certain time of their lives. (God willing, we'll all take a similar walk.) As I began this new career, I moved into higher leadership roles and thrived in the team environment that makes this field what it is. God's call came again right in the middle of this, and whispered to me to walk through a new door as executive director of a not-for-profit senior living ministry. I had been called to serve older adults, and now combined with a Christian focus, I truly felt I was following God's plan for me and my family.

And yes, you guessed it, one day I received yet another call, the call that officially brought me to Ohio and to Willow Brook Christian Communities. I hope you'll join me on this journey—it's going to be a heckuva ride!

“ I TRULY FELT I WAS FOLLOWING GOD'S PLAN FOR ME AND MY FAMILY.



Troy McKnight and his family, wife Lindsey, daughter Ella, son Cason, and daughter Everly.

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To honor the living

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Larry & Janet Harris and Larry Harris's retirement

Joan Bowe

Robert & Barbara Kimball

Jill Vrona

Douglas & Kathryn Warnock



Retired Willow Brook CEO Larry Harris and his beloved wife, Janet, have embarked on a new journey after Larry's 48-year tenure. As Brian McLaren says, "We make the path by walking." May God be with you, Larry, with every step you take.

ACCEPTING THE INVITATION

By Heidi Reed, Director of Assisted Living, Willow Brook at Delaware Run



Left to right, Executive Director John Regalsky, assisted living resident George S., and Director of Assisted Living Heidi Reed, enjoy a beautiful spring day together outside the Water's Edge Restaurant at Willow Brook at Delaware Run.

It is my belief that when a resident and their family choose Willow Brook as their next home, an invitation has been extended to the Willow Brook staff.

This invitation is not your standard, 3x5 pretty colored paper, date imprinted, with expected arrival time in bold. Instead, this invitation is unlike any other they have ever sent; certainly not like one you would ever receive in the mail.

This invitation is a spoken word hinting at needed reassurance. It's a look across the room, indicating the final decision has been made, and please, tell me it's the right one! Sometimes, the invitation clearly states, "I am here, not necessarily because I *want* to be, but because I *need* to be." It's a handshake, after all the conversations, that is so tight, it feels like they will never let go.

We accept the invitation, and over the course of weeks, months, years, or even a decade or more, the staff are given hundreds if not thousands of opportunities to provide care, to nurture often-broken spirits, and to love. We encourage residents to try new things and spread their wings. If it is desired, we pray with our residents and if necessary, step in to advocate for them.

It's in the precious moments of providing care that the foundation of trust is established. It continues to be built with each and every shift, day after day, week after week, month after month. When spirits are down due to a spell of illness, it's our job and privilege to show residents that hope is within reach. When family visits are planned, we are encouraged to stop by and meet them, and as we do we get to witness the holiness of a loving exchange.

We are reminded of the invitation. We have the privilege of a front-row seat to the greatest show, and our eyes and hearts are opened to a side of the resident we may have never seen before. It's surprising, fascinating, and uplifting, and it never gets old. What an honor it is for us to answer their invitation to care for and love them through this part of their lives.

We know that each resident has so much to share and to tell than we could possibly imagine. Even if we are present, we may never know the depth of our residents' experiences: the joys, the pain, the losses, the quiet regrets, or the tragedies. We are reminded to slow down, to relish the invitation, so that we do not miss the moments and opportunities for them to share. The unspoken question of the invitation rings in our ears, Will you be there when I need you the most?

When the time comes for our assisted living residents to leave this earthly life form, to go from the loving arms of staff and their home here at Willow Brook to a divine set of Loving Arms and their Eternal Home, it's time to write my thank you card.

The thank you card is my opportunity to honor our residents who have passed away; an occasion to share my experience of the invitation we received and accepted, and to let our Willow Brook family know how that resident's life has impacted us as individuals, as a campus, and as an organization. We say, Thank you for trusting us and giving us the privilege and honor to have been there for you when you needed us most. Caring for you has been one of the great joys of our life.

EMBRACING ADVENTURE

THREE RESIDENT STORIES



RV ADVENTURES

Larry and Mary waited until they retired to begin their RV adventures across the United States. In preparation, they spent seven years looking for the perfect RV, also called a "rig". "It had to have a real kitchen with a booth," Larry says. Once they found what they were looking for, they set off for adventure and investigation, wanting to discover as much as they could about the USA. Their travels took them to 45 states where they encountered all kinds of local festivals, museums, unique local restaurants, college football stadiums, and state fairs. Mary loves to tell the story of how they visited both Heaven and Hell—two small villages in Michigan. Larry and Mary traveled through ice storms and tornadoes and had a number of on-road

FROM RUSTIC TENTS TO EUROPEAN BED & BREAKFASTS

Yvonne, at 99 years old, recalls with crystal-clear clarity her week-long trip to Tanzania with her husband and a few other couples. Accommodations were rustic. They stayed in tents and followed a makeshift pathway to get to the bathroom. Yvonne recalls looking up from a washstand to see an elephant staring at her, which was a surprise, but not unusual considering the various wild animals that surrounded their tent. The meals, she reports, were cooked by the guides and were delicious. Yvonne shares a delightful story about an afternoon her group stopped for a picnic with the guides. Her husband was holding a piece of chicken when a bird swooped down, grabbed it from his hand, and flew off. Comically, the bird dropped the chicken, only to have a monkey skitter over, snatch it, and dash away! Yvonne and her late husband, Don, also traveled through England (she loved the bed and breakfasts they stayed in); Ireland ("There were beautiful flowers and cliffs



Photo by Christina Dresdow.

Yvonne Campbell (L) and Doris Cook (R) have shared travels and a friendship for 77 years.

overlooking the water"); and Scotland ("We played golf!"). She also had a memorable train trip across Canada.

In a beautiful twist of fate, while we were interviewing Yvonne for this article, a longtime friend came to visit her. It was Doris, who resides at Willow Brook at Delaware Run. Doris was one of her travelmates to Tanzania and the two have been friends for an astonishing 77 years! What a journey, indeed!



Photo by Christina Dresdow.

ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Photo by Christina Dresdow

hiccups, including a broken water pipe in the RV, a water tank dropping on to the interstate, a flat tire on the rig, and Mary taking the wheel from Montana to Knoxville after an unexpected hospitalization for Larry left him unable to drive. Larry and Mary sold their rig in 2021 and moved to Willow Brook in December 2022. They report that campgrounds have become so popular that reservations often must be made a year or more in advance and rates have skyrocketed, some charging as much per night as hotels. Larry and Mary agree that the best part of RVing was the people they got to meet and the new things they got to learn along the way. Says Larry: "If you go on a camping trip and you don't learn anything, it's a wasted trip."



Larry and Mary Eikenberry, independent residents of Willow Brook Christian Village, share stories of their RV adventures.

BIRDING AROUND THE WORLD

Paul and Jan are veteran travelers. They have journeyed all over the world. In the past 21 years, they have logged at least 57 international trips, visiting multiple countries on some of those. Interestingly, Paul and Jan have done much of their travel as birders. Birding requires very early mornings and twilight eves for the best viewing, and that is something they have become less fond of over the years. Along with that, birding accommodations are often tents or huts with no electricity. "We would often judge our birding trip accommodations by whether they were a two candle or a three candle," Paul says. Now they prefer river cruises in Europe (they have one scheduled this spring), tracing their ancestry in trips to Switzerland, and family trips that allow them to spend time with their sons and grandchildren.



Paul and Jan Swartzentruber, independent residents of Willow Brook at Delaware Run, laugh together as they recall a fun moment from their travels.

Paul and Jan have visited all 50 states in the US, with the state of Utah and the National Parks being some of their favorite places. Both have loved immersing themselves in the international cultures they encounter, as well. When it comes to food, Paul says, "We will try anything!" Paul has eaten warthog, impala, antelope, and crocodile, just to name a few. He also tried something called "snake wine" in China, which was a large vat of wine with a (dead) snake coiled in it. Paul swears it tasted like any other wine, while Jan, who sampled just a bit on her tongue, says it was more "earthy."

While travel snafus have been blessedly few and far between, they now travel with only a carry-on suitcase and a backpack, eliminating the wait time in baggage claim and the possibility of lost luggage. They are grateful to be able to travel and want to do so "as long as we are healthy and able to walk," Jan says. One insight they have been graced with is the recognition that while every place they have visited is beautifully unique, we are all still one human family.

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Photo by Christina Dresdow.

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“

A JOURNEY OF A
THOUSAND MILES
BEGINS WITH A
SINGLE STEP.

—LAO TZU

Spring on the walking path at
Willow Brook Christian Village.
Photo by Christina Dresdow.