

REFLECTIONS

VOLUME 45 NUMBER 2 | SUMMER 2023 | GROWTH



WILLOW BROOK CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

CONTENTS

BECOMING A BUCKEYE 3

By Troy McKnight, CEO, WBCC

It's official: after seven months on the job, Troy and his family move to Ohio this month!

BLOOMING WHERE YOU ARE PLANTED 4, 5

By Cathy Courtice, Director of Community Relations, WBCC
& Christina Dresdow, Social Media Coordinator, WBCC

Meet Maria, whose love of gardening has grown over the years.

A CAREER GROWN IN GRACE 7

By Cathy Courtice, Director of Community Relations, WBCC
& Christina Dresdow, Social Media Coordinator, WBCC

The critical role of an activities director and the lives that are touched.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Gentle readers,

Welcome to our summer issue of Reflections. The theme of this quarter's issue is growth. Gardens, families, interests, careers, experiences, awareness—growth is something we can all relate to. That does not mean it is always easy. In fact, growth often requires the dismantling, altering, or destruction of something else. Growth is life! This issue uplifts growth in its myriad forms and may even spur thoughts of how your own growth—or lack thereof—has shaped your life, and continues to do so.

As we wend our way through the summer, I invite you to consider themes you would like to see highlighted in future issues of Reflections. Please send your ideas to editor@willow-brook.org. Until next time, may you be graced by the beauty, bounty, and growth of summer.

Cover Photo: Willow Brook Christian Village residents, Larry and Mary, on a bus trip for a visit to a local Churches of Christ youth camp. Photo by Christina Dresdow.

WILLOW BROOK CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

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Reflections is published quarterly by
Willow Brook Christian Communities
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March 4, 2023 – June 23, 2023

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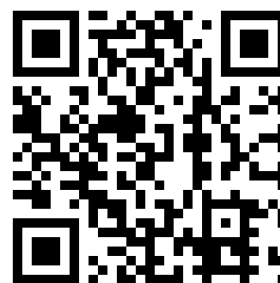
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Continued on page 5



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FIRESIDE CHATS WITH CEO TROY MCKNIGHT

Troy McKnight, CEO of Willow Brook Christian Communities.

Photo by Christina Dresdow.

BECOMING A BUCKEYE

After months of online listings, viewings with the Realtor, and the unique challenges of being a homebuyer in this market, we have finally bought our first home in Ohio! We found a terrific house in an older, established neighborhood. Not only does it check the boxes of our must-have's, the property also boasts huge trees, in fact, some of the largest oak trees I've ever seen – and I thought everything was bigger in Texas! As you read this, my family and I will be closing up shop in Fort Worth and starting a new adventure as Buckeyes.

An experience like this is both a leap of faith and a golden opportunity for growth. Sunflower seeds sprout into tall flowers, kids grow up, night turns into day and day into night, and rotary phones with dials morph into small, flat rectangular devices that accompany us everywhere. Even if we put off our own growth and change, both still happen all around us. There is no escape, because growth and change are the very essence of living, of life. I distinctly remember the growing pains of being a young teenage boy, outgrowing my shirts, pants, and shoes faster than they could be replaced. How my mom and dad kept us three boys fed during those teenage years is nothing short of a miracle!

Because our theme for this issue of Reflections is growth, it seems important to mention that while growth may be natural, it is not always easy, or comfortable. Consider all the ways that you have grown and been transformed in your lifetime, and I am sure you will agree. Just when we

think we have reached a point where we have the answers, we learn there are more questions, and the process begins again. It is a roller coaster ride, our lives, from beginning to end. There is beauty and humanity in that ride; it reminds us that we are all in this together. It empowers us to adapt and sometimes even see perspectives that we had not yet considered.

Together, we can have the courage to embrace growth and learn from it. We can set an example for the generations to come. We can look past our fear to the opportunities on the other side. ❤️



Photo by Christina Dresdow.

Troy greets residents at Delaware Run's Volunteer Reception.

BLOOMING WHERE YOU ARE PLANTED

"Every morning, the first thing I do is get up and go outside to take my tour," says Willow Brook at Delaware Run resident Maria R. Her tour, she explains, is a walk around her garden, the plots surrounding her and her husband Paul's twin-single home. "It's a daily thing for me, I just love it – it's almost therapeutic in a way. I don't feel like I've properly started my day without first taking my tour. And then sometimes I check again in the evening, if I feel like it," she adds. On her tour, Maria pulls any weeds that may have sprung up, prunes plants that need it, checks to make sure everything is thoroughly watered, and of course, also checks to see what the deer got into overnight!

She explains that although she always loved working outside, she didn't officially start gardening until after she and her husband had gotten married and had their first house. "We had a rock wall, and I planted flowers along the wall as well as the house, and he grew a vegetable garden in the yard," she says. They both loved gardening so much, it became a team effort, and every time they moved, they expanded their garden a little more. Maria says she has a very "down to

earth" (pun intended!) approach to gardening. She doesn't like to spend a lot of money on plants or planters – instead she gets creative and turns old pallets into plant holders or goes to the dollar store or quarter auction to get pots.

Maria recalls with fondness one year when they lived in New Jersey, their grandchildren wanted their own gardens. So they drove to the local garden center, and she let each grandchild pick out 13 small plants a piece. They planted them together and for that summer, each grandchild tended their own garden plots at grandma and grandpa's.

In 2015, Maria and Paul moved to Willow Brook at Delaware Run to be closer to family. She says that they took a break from gardening that first year, and had not really been planning to continue it. But when 2016 rolled around, they couldn't resist the opportunity, and thus began their gardens here utilizing the land around their twin-single as well as the resident garden plots available next to the main building.

If you've ever been to Delaware Run, you're probably familiar with the


Flowers in Maria's roadside garden at Willow Brook at Delaware Run. Photo by Christina Dresdow.





little roadside garden on Delaware Crossing by the bridge populated with beautiful flowers, colorful foliage, and little garden ornaments. For the last seven years, Maria has expanded this little garden to the size that it is now. She says it is unlikely that she will expand the garden any further, but that she will continue to update it. Her goal is to create a space akin to the old English gardens, where there is always something growing or in bloom; so she has begun planting perennials as well as annuals. Each year she also updates the garden by switching out or adding a new garden ornament

or two. This year's update was the arrival of a stone duck family and a small green snake, which was 3D printed for her by her grandson, who specifically made it for this garden.

For a gardener like Maria, growth is second nature; it is at the very heart of what she does and holds dear. As her beloved plants and flowers grow, she considers the move she and Paul made to Willow Brook to be closer to family. She says, "I am so grateful to be able to garden, be close to family, and of course, enjoy the fresh produce –especially the pickles!" 

Maria examining her sunflowers outside of her Delaware Run twin-single home.
Photo by Paul R.

Continued from page 2

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Continued on page 6

Continued from page 5

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GIFT OF LOVE AWARD RECIPIENTS 2023

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 three resident volunteers, and we are delighted to share them with you.

Photo by Christina Dresdow.



The Gift of Love 2023 co-recipients for Willow Brook Christian Village are Mary Z. and Helen S. Both of these independent residents invest generous time and effort, loving and serving their fellow residents, particularly those in our Centrum assisted living.

Photo by Christina Dresdow.



Willow Brook at Delaware Run's Gift of Love recipient for 2023 is independent resident Elaine H. Elaine is known for delivering flowers to new residents, folks in assisted living, and staff. She also volunteers in our assisted living and selflessly gives of her time.

A CAREER GROWN IN GRACE

Almost 27 years ago, Christy Turner was perusing the newspaper on a day off from her job at a t-shirt printing company, and came across an opening for a part-time nursing assistant position at a place called Willow Brook Christian Home. She wasn't really looking for a job, but her curiosity won the day, and she called to check it out. At the time, now-retired Willow Brook CEO Larry Harris, was working at the Home. He happened to be doing interviews that very day, so she went in for an interview – and Larry hired her on the spot! Of course, Christy pointed out, she informed Larry that she would be giving her two-week notice at her current job, because her mother always said, "Never burn your bridges, because you never know when you might need to go back and cross them again." But, as it turns out, she didn't need to go back and cross that bridge, because she had found her place at Willow Brook.

Alongside Willow Brook, Christy has grown personally and professionally. After working as a part-time nursing assistant, she moved up to a full-time nursing assistant, and then on to become an STNA (Willow Brook paid for her to complete her schooling for the STNA certification). As time progressed, she realized she wanted to interact more with the residents, so she started doing things with them after hours, on her time off. She even planned a New Year's Eve party for a group of 10 residents, and stayed up with them until midnight! When

Willow Brook created the new position of activities assistant to the activities director, Christy got the job and worked in that position for many years, until last year when she took on the role of activities director.

Growing up, Christy always wanted to be a singer. But who says you need a stage to be a singer? One day, Christy was singing while cleaning the popcorn machine in preparation for an activity, one of the residents approached her and told her that she was so grateful to hear her singing and it had made her day. "To be honest, I didn't even know that anyone could hear me singing," Christy shares. "But the fact that I had been able to make her day, just by singing – I do have my dream job, I just didn't know it was my dream job until I had it."

Christy explains that in her position, growth is inevitable and encouraged. Activity ideas grow and evolve, and over time, she learns new and better ways for an activity to run smoothly and for residents to have the most meaningful experiences possible. Her goal is to bring what's outside in. She explains, "When you and I work for the day, we can go out and do different things: see a concert, hang out with friends, learn a new craft, taste exotic

foods. But for many of our residents, they do not have a way to do that. My goal as activities director is to bring those types of experiences to our residents, right here where they are." To make sure she offers what people are interested in, she meets with residents to ask what types of activities and experiences they are interested in and is constantly brainstorming new ideas, though she admits that some of her ideas just come naturally. For example, she was having a phone conversation with her cousin who mentioned that she was on her way to do African drumming. Christy thought, "Could you do that here at Willow Brook?" Her cousin agreed, and for Juneteenth, a group of residents gathered to hear and participate in African drumming.

As she reflects on nearly three decades working at Willow Brook Christian Home, Christy truly feels that the work that she does "is more than a job, it's a calling. God called me here to make someone smile. And when I see them smile, and getting up and looking forward to coming to activities, seeing their time here as the beginning of a new journey, then I've done my job right." ♥



Photo by anonymous photographer.

Christy (center back) with residents and activities assistant Chris Cerminara (back right) at a recent outing.

REFLECTIONS

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Mosaic wall at Willow Brook at
Delaware Run. Crafted by resident
Dianne A. Photo by Christina Dresdow.