



The Communities of Don Guanella  
and Divine Providence

# Newsletter

## Spring/Summer 2023



*On May 19th, The Communities resident, Jay, had the honor of throwing out the first pitch at the Philadelphia Phillies game. The opportunity came during the Phillies' Catholic Charities Night at Citizens Bank Ball Park. Jay and his family attended the game and was even able to get a photo with the beloved Phillie Phanatic.*

### FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



I am pleased to share with you several stories in this Spring/Summer newsletter edition which demonstrate

our full reentry into the community after the pandemic. You will read several stories which feature our individual and program successes. A new Life Sharing program has been established for medically fragile children at home or in a family-based setting, avoiding institutional placement. This program is only the second of its kind in PA. Also, after three years on hiatus, the Spring Formal returned and was a joyous celebration.

It is with deep appreciation that we highlight two of our most faithful friends and supporters, The Gula and Riley families. The generosity of these two philanthropic families has made a significant impact on the lives of our individuals. These families have embraced our mission, and shown true selflessness and charity. Thank you to these special families and all of our supporters who truly make a difference in the lives of those entrusted to our care.

*Fran Swiacki*

Fran Swiacki  
Executive Director



# Spring Sprung

## *with a Rock 'n Roll Formal!*

In poodle skirts and leather jackets, individuals from The Communities of Don Guanella and Divine Providence Village (DGDP) danced the night away at their Spring Formal last month. Held on June 13th at The Drexelbrook, these Pink Ladies and T-birds were treated to a Grease-themed evening of rock and roll, food, and fun.

This is the first Spring Formal to be held in three years. Fran Swiacki, Executive Director of The Communities said we have emerged from the pandemic stronger and more resilient than ever. “Returning to in-person events like the Spring Formal and our Family Christmas party in 2022 brought so much joy to our staff and the families who rely on our services. But most importantly to



the individuals whom we serve,” said Fran. This annual event provides men and women living with intellectual disabilities a special opportunity to socialize and reconnect.

Special events like the Spring Formal are also a long-standing tradition for The Communities. What started as a date night for some of the residents twenty years ago evolved into a formal for all. Our leadership team and direct support professionals work endlessly preparing for a wonderful dinner and night of dancing. Everyone as they age always remembers their proms, our individuals love this event as they see friends from their past. It's always a fun reunion for all.



## A Special **Thank You** to our Partners ~

We are so very grateful for our generous Partners who help make all of our special events possible. These events create wonderful memories and have a lasting impact on the lives we serve.

### **Compassion Core Value Partner: \$10,000**

Vince Iacone's Automotive Inc., Springfield PA

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William Henderson Plumbing & Heating, LLC

### **Charity Core Value Partner: \$1,000**

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### **Dignity Core Value Partner: \$500**

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*"Charity lights the path to Divine Love."* ~ Don Guanella

## Deacon's Story

### *Life Sharing Program*



*Deacon enjoying computer time in the comfort of his family's home.*

A recent article published on **CatholicPhilly.com** shares a glimpse inside The Communities' Life Sharing Program. The story focuses on Deacon, a seven year-old with extensive care needs. While the Life Sharing Program allows Deacon to live with his mother in his own family's home, other program participants reside with host families.

The Communities' Life Sharing Program is a caring network of 67 host families supporting 73 individuals with intellectual disabilities. Children and adults who are part of the program are welcomed as family members.

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# Challenger Whiffle Ball League

## The Tradition Continues with the Gula Family

*"It has been such an honor and humbling experience, following in my parents' footsteps of running the Challenger League. My sisters and I have been involved with the program for over 25 years, and the men and women of The Communities continue to inspire us each year with their tenacity and bubbly personalities on and off the field."*

*The games are fun for players and volunteers alike when we get on that wiffle ball "field" to play week after week. The best part about it is the strong bonds we all form through league play, whether it's seeing players have a great at bat or hearing an amazing rendition of "Take Me out to the Ballgame" at the end of each game. It's really amazing to see how much this league continues to bring our community together and how players and volunteers interact and enjoy the camaraderie and competition.*

*Thanks to the generosity of St. Pius X for the use of their facilities, the Monsignor Bonner Friars Baseball Team, Cardinal O'Hara Community Service volunteers, Fr. Dennis, and our coaches and volunteers. Because of you, we are able to keep this long-standing tradition going."*

*-Kelsey (Gula) Aitken*



Kelsey Gula assisting a resident during a game.



Patty of Divine Providence Village with Kelsey, her parents, Jim and Tina, and three generations of the Gula Family

Jim and Tina Gula's steadfast support of The Communities' mission continues to make a positive impact on those we serve. One of their most rewarding gifts is the **Challenger Whiffle Ball League**, which the Gula Family co-founded and has remained deeply involved in for more than a quarter of a century. To ensure the league continues to flourish far into the future, Jim and Tina are passing on the torch to one of their daughters, Kelsey.

Kelsey and her husband Steve have been leading the Challenger League during the 2023 season. The couple has been joined by many friends at the league's weekly games, which provide a meaningful, fun activity for the men and women who live at The Communities. The residents and The Gula Family have also built a beautiful bond through the years. Kelsey describes that bond and talks about her experience with the league in her beautiful letter.

# Wawa Day Brightener

## Mary Recognized with Award

In conjunction with the **59th Wawa Day Celebration**, community members were invited to submit “**Day Brightener**” stories about “associates who brighten days and create magical moments.” Mary, who resides at The Communities’ and works at the Upper Chichester Wawa, was nominated. She and her supervisor, Sara (who hired Mary in December 2021), received the honor of a special day at Wawa headquarters, which included gifts of Wawa clothing, gift cards, facility tours, the sampling of new products, and enjoying lunch with VIP and Wawa CEO, Chris Gheysens.



Mary with her job coach, Latoya (left) and Store Manager, Sara (right)

Before the COVID-19 quarantine response, Mary worked as an office assistant at Llanerch Country Club. As pandemic restrictions eased, with the continued assistance of the Fatima Day Program Community Employment Team and her Life Sharing family, Mary learned her new Wawa job at the coffee counter and has loved working there ever since. She works Monday through Friday during the fast-paced hours of 7 a.m. - 9 a.m.

Alongside her job coach, Mary keeps the coffee station cleaned and supplied and always makes time to brighten people’s days.



Mary on the job at the Wawa coffee counter

Mary was admitted to St. Mary of Providence in Elverson, PA, in 1980, just before her 13th birthday. She moved to Divine Providence Village in Springfield

when the new campus opened in 1984 and transitioned to a Life Sharing provider home, where she became part of their family in 2014. Since becoming part of The Communities, and through significant social and emotional skills work, Mary has blossomed to enrich others’ lives.

### Mary’s customer nomination read in part:

*“... To say Mary is a bright light in a dim world wouldn’t accurately describe her energy and what she radiates to her customers. Mary is now a staple of the Upper Chichester Wawa for so many. She greets everyone coming to the coffee station personally and remembers names, occupations, coffee preferences, and so many more details for hundreds of customers coming in during the morning rush ... I know for so many, Mary is a shining light to our mornings.”*



# Spring & Summer Happenings

## *The Guys Visit the American Helicopter Museum*



## *The Ladies Cruise the Delaware on The Spirit of Philadelphia*





# Riley Family Foundation

## *Supports Our Lady of Fatima Day Programs*



A recent gift from the Riley Family Foundation is supporting participants of Our Lady of Fatima Day Programs a number of ways. Thanks to the foundation's generous donation, we have installed a much-needed wheelchair ramp so our clients can enjoy the gymnasium. The donation also allowed funds for adaptive bicycles.



HAVE YOU MADE YOUR DONATION TO OUR ANNUAL FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN?  
Please use the enclosed envelope, or go to [dgdpcommunities.org](https://dgdpcommunities.org)

## Linda & Jack

### *A Love Story*

Jackie and Linda were inseparable from the moment they met at The Communities of Don Guanella and Divine Providence. The two developed a special bond during Day Program and became fast friends. Friendship turned to love, and the two dated for 25 years.

After more than two decades of special events, dances and holidays together, the COVID-19 Pandemic separated the two physically but not in spirit. Jackie and Linda continued their courtship through Facetime. When they reunited after social distancing restrictions lifted, it was clear their relationship never skipped a beat.

Sadly, Linda recently passed, but we know she will always be in Jackie's heart until they meet again. Their love was a gift from God and represents the true meaning of The Communities. The men of Don Guanella and ladies of Divine Providence are part of a family that is filled with medical, love and respect.





The Communities of Don Guanella  
and Divine Providence

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**Day Programs at Our Lady of Fatima**

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the  
Date*



The Communities of Don Guanella  
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**DAY of GIVING**  
**10.24.2023**

