

MILL CREEK VILLAGE CELEBRATES ITS 10TH ANNIVERSARY AND PAYS TRIBUTE TO ITS CARING VOLUNTEERS ON APRIL 28

On April 28, 2023, 42 current and former Mill Creek Village volunteers participated in a special celebration acknowledging the Village's milestone 10th anniversary and expressing gratitude to the many volunteers that created and helped the organization to persevere and thrive in service to the Mill Creek Towne Community. Village President Joe Isaacs noted that "this achievement is even more impressive when you factor in that, unlike other most senior villages across the country, Mill Creek Village continues to require no dues from its patrons, never has charged fees for its services and programs, nor ever had the assistance of paid professional staff."

The party was a celebration of the volunteer spirit that made the village possible. It was held at the Knights of Columbus Hall in Derwood. Participants enjoyed one another's company and listened to brief presentations by current and former Village leaders. They dined on salad and assorted pizzas and enjoyed an array of beverages, many of which were donated by Derwood Beer and Wine on Redland Road. They also shared in delicious anniversary cake! A cake lighting ceremony was deftly handled by Village Secretary Ed Ludwig and his lovely wife Robbie! Isaacs offered special thanks for the efforts of Kristin Mitas for helping to plan and implement the event, her husband Guy Federico, and his own wife Debbie Isaacs for their assistance with party logistics.

In his presentation to attendees, Isaacs quoted the African proverb that "It takes a village to raise a child." And then he explained that: "In the instance of senior villages such as Mill Creek Village, it takes a community of compassionate neighbors willing to support their elderly and disabled neighbors so that those neighbors can age safely and well in their homes, avert social isolation and prolong their independence." Yes, he emphasized, it takes the time, energy, and dedication of volunteers to promote a socially connected and caring community." He then quoted American anthropologist Margaret Mead, who said: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

Joe went on to say that "for a decade, Mill Creek Village volunteers (more than 90 of whom were individually acknowledged in a handout) have shared their grace and love to make a difference in the lives of their neighbors. Over that time, if you count the remainder of activities expected in 2023, these volunteers have since 2013:

- Dedicated more than 12,000 person hours and tremendous in-kind support in service to residents of Mill Creek Towne;
- Led and managed the organization's development to ensure it remained financially and operationally viable;
- Provided transportation assistance, friendly home visits, check-in calls and grocery shopped more than 1,500 times for elderly and disabled residents;
- Published more than 250 issues of our e-newsletter, "Mill Creek Towne News;"
- Produced and administered to an informative website at www.millcreekvillage.org that houses among other things a photo gallery of hundreds of neighborhood event memories and many useful resources;

- Moderated a popular Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/millcreekvillageinc/> with more than 300 postings annually about household and health tips, local news of importance and free and low-cost programs of interest to residents; and
- Hosted and delivered flyers to every household for more than 50 free neighborhood social events that have drawn more than 2600 participants.”

Isaacs concluded his remarks by asking those in the audience to join him in a toast, saying: “ *Happy 10th Anniversary Mill Creek Village and both congratulations and thank you to all of us for making its good work possible. May we enjoy many more years of service to our elderly neighbors and community! Cheers!*”

Borrowing from the musical “Hamilton” Joe then invited two co-founders of the Village who “were in the room where it happened” to join him at the podium and share the early history in response to a set of questions. One was Jane Lewis who is still a Village driver and was part of the first board and the e-newsletter editor for many years. The other was W.D. McAdams, the Village’s first President.

Among the things they shared was that the person who was foremost behind starting the Village in Mill Creek was the late Betty Rossi, who lived on Miller Fall Road. Sadly, Betty did not remain in the community long enough to see much of the fruits of her labor. Without her impetus, said both Jane and W.D., the Village might have never come to be. Betty held the organizing meeting in her home in late 2011, where nearly 50 neighbors attended. She identified people who believed in “paying it forward” and giving others the helping hand that they too might need some day!

A working group then committed to learning more about the “Village” concept begun in Boston’s Beacon Hill neighborhood. That village provided various templates to others interested in developing a village. The group also sought advice from leaders of one of Maryland’s first senior villages, Burning Tree Village in Bethesda. The group then took until April of 2013 to create bylaws, formally register as a charitable community service organization, and elect its first Board of Directors.

In addition to W.D. and Jane, that first board included Joe Blanton, Sandra Crausman, Barbara Feldmann and Derek Harding. Sue Richardson was the Social Committee Chair and Judith Johnson, was and continues to be the Villages Volunteer Coordinator and the Village’s liaison to the Senior Connection, the umbrella organization that trains and schedules our drivers and friendly home visitors. Susanne Hardy was the original newsletter editor. They were all committed to building a spirit of caring and community. At that time, a notebook had been prepared titled “Village Blueprint, Building a Community for All Ages.” It contained a listing of resources including “Legal Aid” and that is how we identified the services of Hal Halpern. Hal served as our pro bono legal advisor. He reviewed our bylaws, attended most of our early board meetings and came to several events before he retired.

From the outset, the focus was both on “aging in place” and providing fun, intergenerational community-wide events that would foster neighbors’ engagement and social connection. Offering then the services we continue to provide today made for strong selling points to both volunteers and early patrons. A survey affirmed that. Jane said one early idea, that was not actively pursued but might be worth revisiting, was establishing a cadre of retired older residents that could babysit neighborhood kids while their parents ran errands.

The initial board had its challenges with leadership succession, Jane and W.D. shared. While folks were very willing to volunteer to provide services, some arm-twisting to secure new board members to succeed them. Though there were villages already charging dues, we determined it would not fly in Mill Creek Towne, where neighbors were grateful not to have a home-owners association and its associated dues. So, despite having very limited funds, the original Village Board put its faith in the generosity of our neighbors to support the Village with monetary and in-kind donations. Jane and W.D. gave kudos to Joe Isaacs and the current Board for effectively pursuing business sponsorships and acquiring grants so the Village would not still have to live “hand-to-mouth” as expenses grew over the years. They too applauded all the volunteers and wished the Village well for the next 10 years.

Here are some photos from the 10th Anniversary Volunteer celebration. Others will be posted on the Village website in the new and events photo gallery. The handout citing all current and former volunteers, the president’s celebratory remarks and the comments shared by the co-founders will be posted as well.