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**Dunwoody Village's
floral committee** brighten
the days of residents and
community members alike.

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The creations of Dunwoody Village's floral committee brighten the days of residents and community members alike.

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Fran Northrup, leader of the floral committee at Dunwoody Village

In Bloom

The renowned American botanist and horticulturist Luther Burbank once compared flowers to “sunshine, food, and medicine to the soul.” He also said, “Flowers always make people better, happier, and more helpful.”

Few understand his declarations more intimately than the residents who belong to the floral committee at Dunwoody Village, a continuing care retirement community in Newtown Square. The floral committee, one of nearly 30 resident-led groups that plan and orchestrate much of the programming that occurs at Dunwoody, spreads sunshine and joy to those around them.

Under the tutelage of Fran Northrup, who created a floral design studio at Dunwoody when she moved there in 2015, residents meet regularly to create fresh and silk floral displays for fellow residents and staff, as well as schools in Delaware County.

“In the beginning, I started out with just a handful of people on the committee,” says Northrup. “We began by making



arrangements for residents in the care center and for the dining rooms. As interest grew, and more people got involved, we began to make floral wreaths, arrangements, gifts, and trees that are sold at Dunwoody's annual fall bazaar. We're now up to over 25 members, which is thrilling."

Northrup's encouraging nature has helped to enrich the lives of all involved, from the people who make the arrangements to those who receive them, including residents who are sick or in the hospital. Her enthusiasm, not only for flower arranging but also for having a positive impact on others, becomes contagious.

"Everyone really enjoys it," Northrup adds. "A lot of people are apprehensive at first, because they've never done floral arranging before. So, they come for the camaraderie, and soon they're creating arrangements. They surprise themselves."

Taking Root

A native of Cleveland, Northrup's interest in flowers and floral displays blossomed when she moved to the Philadelphia area in 1978. A friend who was on a committee at the Philadelphia Flower Show invited her to the show. Northrup was hooked.

"I fell in love with the whole thing," she recalls. "I got involved right away, and I kept doing more and more on the artistic side of it." She started taking classes and workshops in flower arranging, including classes at Longwood Gardens and a week-long intensive workshop at the National Cathedral. Her drive for excellence culminated in chairing the Flower Show for two years. Now, her passion for floral arranging extends beyond Dunwoody Village; she continues to take classes, and she designs arrangements for her church as well as for weddings of family and friends.

While Dunwoody residents can thank Northrup for founding the floral committee there, they also must give a nod to her brother, who proposed the idea to her six years ago.

"As we were preparing to move to Dunwoody Village in 2015," she says, "my brother was helping us clean out our basement. When he saw my massive amounts of floral arranging supplies, he suggested that I offer to donate those supplies and my expertise in exchange for a dedicated space for residents to use as a floral studio."

"Dunwoody's administration has been so supportive and encouraging to me and the residents who want to make the floral designs," she continues. "It's just fabulous."

Led by Northrup, Dunwoody residents who participate in the floral design classes recently collaborated with a nonprofit organization known as Teachers' Teammates. Based in Havertown, the organization brings together resources to offer all



teachers in Delaware County the opportunity to receive free supplies for use in their classrooms. Businesses and individuals can donate supplies to be used by teachers and students.

"We made more than 125 floral arrangements for Teachers' Teammates," Northrup says. "The head of the group, Raelyn Harman, contacted us. She had received donations of silk flowers and containers and asked if we'd make floral arrangements for 41 of the schools she collaborates with. It was right in the middle of COVID, but we agreed and dedicated nine weeks to the project. We did three for each school."

The arrangements, each one of which was unique, were sent to the schools for National Teacher Appreciation Week. Northrup says the residents were thrilled to help. She is always thinking of ways to make someone's day brighter, both within the Dunwoody family and in the surrounding community. She has introduced projects for May Day and Valentine's Day. Last August, Northrup coordinated a project to show Dunwoody employees how deeply residents appreciated the work they were doing amidst the pandemic.

"We decorated over 250 gift bags, each



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of which included a hand-written thank you note," she says. "The group collaborated with administration to fill each bag with cookies, candy, potato chips, and a 'Hero' pin. It was a small way to thank them for all they do for us."

One of the things Northrup likes most about living at Dunwoody is the family atmosphere in which residents engage with others and give back in whatever way they can. She says someone once told her the floral display class resembles a ministry of sorts.

"I never thought of it that way, but, yes, in a way it is," she says. "We're using flowers to help people feel better about themselves and others." ■