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'A Resort for Seniors'

At **Waverly Heights**, residents enjoy an exceptional lifestyle built on connection, compassion, and world-class hospitality.

BY BILL DONAHUE | PHOTOS BY JODY ROBINSON

Jack and Susan Owens met more than 40 years ago during a whitewater rafting trip on the Lehigh River. They got married and built a life in Berwyn, where they lived happily for 34 years.

About five years ago they decided it was time to downsize. The search for a new place to call home began shortly after.

"We didn't want to move to a community that didn't have medical facilities, because if your health ever does change you end up having to move twice," Jack recalls. "At first we looked in the city, where we figured we would be able to walk to anywhere we wanted to go. Then we started looking at places in small towns, but none of it was anything that said, 'This is the place for you.' So we started looking at some of the CCRCs in the area."

At about the same time, a next-door neighbor had gone to Waverly Heights in Gladwyne to recuperate from a surgical procedure.

"After a couple of weeks, she called her son and said, 'Sell the house; I'm not coming home,'" Jack says. "That got our attention."

Jack and Susan promptly decided to tour Waverly Heights on their own. In the process, they connected with a number of residents with whom they shared dinners, cocktails, and conversation about the lifestyle they enjoyed at the community.

"I asked each of them the same question, about whether they had made the right decision [to come to Waverly Heights]," Jack recalls. "I got the same answer from all 14 people: 'We would have come here sooner.' We moved in November 2019. It's taken a little while, but we now understand exactly what they meant."

Waverly Heights is a nationally accredited, not-for-profit Life Plan Community devoted to providing residents with an exceptional lifestyle in a compassionate, respectful environment. Situated on a 61-acre former estate in the heart of Philadelphia's Main Line, the community is home to more than 300 residents in virtually every level of care, from independent living to skilled nursing support, on one central campus.

Hospitality is a foundational principle at Waverly Heights, which should come as no surprise considering the education and background of its chief executive.

President and CEO Thomas P. Garvin spent his formative years working in the hospitality, dining, and housekeeping departments of what was then known as Warminster General Hospital in Bucks County, which his mother served as CEO. He went on to study hotel, restaurant, and institutional management at Penn State University, where he would later earn a Master of Management, Health Care Administration. He then honed his leadership skills with some of the biggest names in the hospitality industry, including Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts and Walt Disney World.

"This is an extraordinary community serving residents from the greater Main Line and from around the country," says Garvin, who joined Waverly Heights 13 years ago. "Everyone who works here has what I call a 'hospitality mentality.' We want to take care of our employees as well as we take care of our residents, because having great

Jack and Susan Owens moved into Waverly Heights in 2019. "We made a superb decision," Jack says.



Jack and Susan Owens, shown here with President and CEO Thomas P. Garvin, have been delighted by how freely residents volunteer their time and talents. They attribute such communitywide engagement to the administration's focus on hospitality.

→ Waverly Heights

1400 Waverly Road
Gladwyne, PA 19035
(610) 645-8600

waverlyheightsltd.org

employees and low turnover contributes to the overall wellbeing of the community.”

The “hospitality mentality” applies to every aspect of the Waverly Heights experience, which is why Garvin refers to the community as “a resort for seniors.” Dining is a fine example. Five years ago Waverly Heights underwent a “massive renovation” of its dining capabilities through a planning process with the community’s board of trustees. It now offers five different dining venues for residents in independent living—everything from formal dining to casual cafés to alfresco dining in the summer—as well as restaurant-quality options for residents in personal care and skilled nursing.

Regardless of the venue, each meal is prepared by a team of highly trained culinary

professionals.

“It’s the farthest thing from institutional dining,” Garvin says. “I have lunch here with the residents a few times a week, and I can honestly say it’s one of the best restaurants in the area. My favorite dish is probably the Chilean seabass with lemon-caper sauce, which is a Waverly Heights favorite. We also have a huge wine selection, with a terrific happy hour every night and almost nightly entertainment. Our residents seem to really enjoy that.”

In addition to revitalizing its dining program, Waverly Heights has expanded its health and wellness areas with a fully renovated fitness center and outdoor amenities such as a natural-grass putting green and courts for bocce and croquet. The community also recently completed a \$3.5 million realignment of its healthcare center, to enhance its ability to care for residents in need of personal care and memory support.

The inspiration for Waverly Heights’ revitalization efforts comes from many sources. For example, Waverly Heights belongs to Novare, an organization that fosters collaboration among forward-thinking single-site and small-system Life Plan Communities in noncompeting markets; Waverly Heights is the only Novare member from Pennsylvania. Garvin says membership in the organization enables the sharing of “the most innovative thinking and new ideas” in all facets of community stewardship, with the end goal of enriching residents’ lives.

Of course, engaged residents such as Jack and Susan Owens are perhaps the best agents of change. Jack is the current president of the Residents Association, which oversees

more than 30 different subcommittees that touch just about every aspect of life at Waverly Heights. Susan, meanwhile, has either led or participated in various committees and forums. Last year, for example, she chaired the holiday bazaar, an annual fundraiser to finance future programming and an employee-appreciation initiative to express residents’ gratitude for their service.

“We have about 250 residents in independent living, and probably 115 people helped with the bazaar throughout the year,” Susan says. “It’s amazing how many people pitch in. We have earned a fair amount of money over the years, through the bazaar and other programs, and that money funds the things residents want to do without them having to pay more money.”

“I have never been part of a community in which all the people involved want to row in the same direction,” Jack adds. “People are glad to volunteer, and I honestly think that comes from the administration’s focus on hospitality. It’s in place here, and you can tell.”

Jack and Susan both say the move to Waverly Heights has exceeded their expectations in almost every way. Their dog, a seven-year-old Cavalier King Charles spaniel named Fiddlesticks, seems to have enjoyed the transition, too.

“I didn’t expect to enjoy living here as much as I have,” Susan says. “I thought it would be fine, but it’s been incredibly interesting, and the staff is so supportive and gracious. The other thing is that there are a lot of people here in their 90s who are still going full steam. The people who live here are very active, and that helps to keep you young.”

“We made a superb decision [by coming to Waverly Heights],” Jack concludes. “We have made friends with so many interesting people and are involved in so many activities every day. In fact, we spend so much time with the new friends we’ve made, we have to be careful not to neglect the friends who were in our lives before we moved here.” ■



Everyone who works here has what I call a **‘hospitality mentality.’**

—THOMAS P. GARVIN,
PRESIDENT AND CEO OF WAVERLY HEIGHTS