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Rydal Park & Waters
resident **Joan
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A Community of Giving

Known as a welcoming and diverse community for older adults, **Rydal Park & Waters** attracts residents who devote their time and talents to helping others.

JOAN MYERSON SHRAGER BELIEVES HER DESIRE TO GIVE BACK LIVES IN HER DNA, PASSED DOWN FROM HER PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS.

“It’s part of who I am,” says Shrager, who lives at Rydal Park & Waters, a not-for-profit community in Jenkintown that has been serving older adults for 50 years. “Helping other people gives me as much as it gives them.”

A professional artist and native Philadelphian, Shrager has long used her artistic training and talent as a force for good in the world. In the 1990s, Shrager was the owner and director of ArtForms, a cooperative art gallery located in Manayunk that provided an abundance of free artistic and cultural programs to the community.

In 2006, she and fellow artist Paula Mandel co-founded The Stained Glass Project: Windows that Open Doors. First based in Germantown and then Roxborough, The Stained Glass Project is now headquartered at Woodmere Art Museum in Chestnut Hill. There, local high school students learn the delicate craft of making stained glass, as well as life lessons to take with them.

Shrager says the project represents a “great coming together” of people from various faiths and backgrounds, all working together to make the world a better place.

Through this project, students—many of whom never had an art class before—learn an art form that requires tremendous self-discipline, focus, and cooperation. They also have the opportunity to become part of something bigger than themselves; the project has created hundreds of stained-glass installations as a means of adding beauty in parts of the world affected by tragedy—among them, a school in New Orleans demolished by Hurricane Katrina, a center for orphans



Rydal Park & Waters resident Joan Myerson Shrager uses her artistic talent and training as a force for good in the world.

affected by AIDS in South Africa, and an impoverished school in Uganda.

In June 2010, a group of high school students in Germantown created 18 stained-glass windows that were exhibited in Philadelphia's LOVE Park and Visitor Center. The exhibition drew praise from several notable figures, including Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter, former Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell, and former President Clinton, who wrote in a letter of recognition, "I want to commend you for using your talents to help others."

Shrager still receives calls and emails from former students who tell her how much the program meant to them, and how it helped them endure challenging times.

"It's not just about what you give but what you get," she says. "I've met all kinds of kids and got to see them grow and work hard to make something beautiful. I feel so enriched by those connections, which I never would have had if not for [The Stained Glass Project]."

The desire for connection is among the things that drew her to Rydal Park & Waters two years ago. She was living in Abington, at the height of the pandemic, when she realized she needed a change.

"The main reason I'm here is the special friendliness that I've seen nowhere else," she says. "I didn't feel the need to shop around. There's a warmth here that made me feel, 'This is the place I need to be.' ... It's a lovely place with a lot of diversity and highly educated people."

She spends her days immersed in her work as a digital artist. Some of her work is designed to support specific causes or shed light on injustices. In response to the tragedy of the war in Ukraine, for example, she created an online art exhibition for the Abington Arts Center told through the lens of her own Jewish heritage and Ukrainian roots.

Many of Shrager's fellow Rydal Park & Waters residents share her philanthropic



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—JOAN MYERSON SHRAGER, SHOWN HERE WORKING ON HER DIGITAL ART

leanings. Stan and Jackie Silverman, who moved to the community from their home in Dresher three years ago, are among them.

If their names sound familiar, it might be from the couple's many philanthropic efforts throughout the years, or from Stan's weekly *Philadelphia Business Journal* column about leadership in business. As the former CEO of a global manufacturing firm, he has served on the boards of numerous companies and organizations, and has since whittled his commitments down to three: a member of the board of trustees for AIM Academy, vice chairman of the board of trustees for Drexel University, and a member of the board of directors for St. Christopher's Hospital for Children.

"Everything we do is aimed at children's education and children's health," he says. "Our children are our future, so everything we do in terms of philanthropy is to make sure kids get on the right road."

The Silvermans' philanthropy led to their receipt of the 2022 Community Leadership Award presented by the National Kidney Foundation.

Moving to Rydal Park & Waters has enabled the Silver-

mans to simplify their lives and focus solely on "what's most important to us," as Jackie puts it—namely, spending time with family and close friends, using their time and talents to help others in need, and gathering with their kids and grandkids at their shore home in Margate, New Jersey.

"I do not miss the lawn care, the snow plowing, the tree surgeon, and everything else you have to be concerned about when you have a large home with an acre of property," Stan adds. "Now we have a single home on one floor that's close to our old neighborhood and is near shopping and a good place to exercise. Moving here has decomplicated our lives. You can focus on what you want to do with your time."

Joan Myerson Shrager feels largely the same way. Whereas some people are content to sit back and relax in retirement, she has no intention of scaling back or slowing down anytime soon.

"I still feel young and part of the world," she says. "I'm very fortunate in that I still walk a couple of miles every day. I still drive. I still see and hear well, which is pretty amazing. As long as I have my health I intend to continue to do my art, to stay in touch with people I love, and to help the kids I have met through The Stained Glass Project. I feel enriched by it, and it's meant the world to me." ■

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Stan and Jackie Silverman, also residents of Rydal Park & Waters, have supported various philanthropic causes focused on improving education and health for children.