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Vero Beach prepares for the holidays with

Tantalizing Treats





Senior Class

COLLABORATION AND TECHNOLOGY ENHANCE PROGRAMS AND SERVICES THAT PROMOTE HEALTH, HAPPINESS AND INDEPENDENCE FOR AGING ADULTS

BY ANN TAYLOR
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARTINA TANNERY

Smiles. That's the first thing you see when you look at the budding artists gathered around a table. With brushes in hand and pots of paint to dip them in, they're happily creating their personal masterpieces.

No, this isn't a classroom at the Vero Beach Museum of Art; these students are participating in an artful engagement program at the Senior Resource Association. Led by artist and certified instructor Dawn Miller, it's a colorful collaboration between SRA and VBMA that produces joy-filled moments and some pretty amazing results.

Once a week, Miller, who heads up the museum's Art for Health's Sake community initiative, and a handful of volunteers who call themselves the Blue Angels, arrive at SRA's state-licensed Adult Enrichment & Respite facilities in Vero Beach and Sebastian.

"We come in, wearing our blue aprons, and get everyone warmed up by doing exercises like shaking out their hands and singing; then we introduce the project, which could involve watercolors, acrylics, pastels, cut-and-torn paper and clay," Miller explains.

"The focus is not as much on the end result but on the process, which provides opportunities for people to interact with one another and share a little about themselves. It's how I learn about who they are and what they've done with their lives.

Denise Hegener, seen here before the pandemic with Randy, was named the 2020 Humana Senior Volunteer of the Year by the Florida Association of Aging Services Providers.

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“For instance, there’s a man who draws horses. He used to ride as a kid, and somehow horses always show up in what he’s doing,” she says, adding enthusiastically, “Senior Resource Association was one of the first to collaborate with the museum when we started the program, and we have a great relationship. We just had our first art show and it was a huge success.”

The potential for success is built in to everything SRA does, thanks to services designed to support and advocate for the independence and dignity of aging adults. The goal is to keep them healthy and in their own homes for as long as safely possible.

It’s a known fact that as people age there’s a tendency for them to have fewer relationships and opportunities for social contact – a trend that can lead to loneliness and the risk of isolation. SRA seeks to prevent that outcome through Meals on Wheels, Pet Meals on Wheels, and congregate meals at six locations throughout Indian River County.

For those who need transportation, there’s Community Coach and GoLine, both of which have received national and state awards. SRA also provides the Emergency Home Energy Assistance for the Elderly Program and manages a public guardianship program. All are made possible through limited public funding, generous donors, grants and collaborations with other nonprofits and agencies, with little or no fee to the client.

“This is a great organization that provides a better quality of life for seniors every day. What we

do is a lot of hard work, but a lot of fun and very rewarding,” says SRA President and CEO Karen Deigl, leaning forward as she talks about services that respond to present community needs.

“We did a focus group, and it became evident that the name Adult Day Care wasn’t what we were about, and it needed to be changed. That led to our Adult Enrichment & Respite programs,

including DayAway, which offers a number of activities our clients can choose from.”

Those clients are as diverse as the needs that have them coming through the doors, from adults 18 years and older who have cognitive and/or physical disabilities to aging adults who are dealing with memory or physical issues that prevent them from participating in community programs as they once did, but



Karen Deigl is president and CEO of SRA.



Shawna Callaghan serves as director of programs for the organization.



Vero Beach Museum of Art teachers in blue aprons gather with DayAway clients. Today, events involve social distancing.



Karen and Peter Pierce, volunteers with Meals on Wheels for more than 20 years, greet Louise at one of their regular stops. Since the onset of COVID-19, masked deliveries have become the norm.

DENISE RITCHIE

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Vero Beach's beloved Alma Lee Loy was a staunch supporter of SRA and the work performed by people like Karen Deigl. Here they enjoy the 2018 annual Bingo Luncheon.



SRA collaborates with VBMA to provide art classes. Today the classes are smaller to allow for social distancing.



Things that were important to seniors when they were younger often appear in their drawings.

are not ready for full-time care.

SRA Director of Programs Shawna Callaghan relates the story of a woman with young children who brings her mother-in-law, who is in a wheelchair, to DayAway, where she can take part in activities and socialize with others.

"She doesn't want to leave her mother-in-law alone during the day, but she needs to care for her children and continue on with her own life. She knows that her mother-in-law is in a safe place where she can engage with others and be cared for. We have one caregiver to every six clients and a licensed nurse here at all times. It's part of the continuum of care, and we're sort of the stage in the middle," says Callaghan.

"Then there are those who had been active in community programs but for one reason or another are no longer able to be involved. That's where the collaborations we've formed with others come in. Through them we have art classes, we've formed a master gardener club, and, just before COVID-19 arrived, we had our first cooking club program. We offer our clients the chance to do things themselves. We change people's lives."

Not only do SRA's programs and services change the lives of clients, their caregivers benefit as well.

Deigl relates the story of a longtime golfer who regularly played in a foursome with close friends. While he was putting on the green, his wife was out enjoying lunch with her friends. When the husband began showing signs of dementia, his golfing buddies became concerned; eventually, that concern led to a phone call to his wife.

"They told her they didn't think



Initiatives like the master gardener club enable seniors to continue to pursue their old hobbies. Here, Ines enjoys the Serenity Garden with Danielle, a certified nursing assistant.

he could continue playing with them," says Deigl. "The couple ended up at our door. They took a tour of our facilities and we explained our activities, which are different every day. He reluctantly decided to give our DayAway program a try and he's still coming. The husband is getting socialization and his wife is back having lunch with her friends. That's just

one of many success stories we see on a daily basis."

Five days a week, SRA welcomes its first clients at 7:30 in the morning and waves the last ones on their way at 5:30 in the afternoon. Some clients may stay only a short time, while others stay longer; either way, it's time well spent as they participate in a variety of activities, engage with one another and enjoy

a healthy lunch.

But what about those seniors who are homebound, those who for whatever reason do not have the wherewithal to prepare meals for themselves, or have little contact with other people? It's SRA's Meals on Wheels to the rescue. The volunteer-driven program that delivers hot, nutritious meals to clients' doors is

not just about the food; it's also a friendly social visit and daily wellness check.

For over 20 years, seasonal residents Karen and Peter Pierce have been involved with the Meals on Wheels program, giving of their time and resources to help others. Why do they do it? The answer is simple.

"It's so important. Some people can't get out to buy food, and they have no one else to talk with during the day. They're so appreciative that we spend time with them," says Karen, who became involved when

she was reading the newspaper and saw an ad for Meal on Wheels: "Volunteers Needed." "Once our boys were off to school I started looking for something to do," Karen recalls. "I saw the ad and thought gee whiz, this was something I would enjoy doing, so I called. I'm so glad I did. It was a perfect fit for me then, and still is."

It wasn't long before Peter joined her on the delivery route they now know by heart. A new mobile app on their cellphone gives them directions and the ability to report concerns back to the Meals

on Wheels staff. The couple has the drill down pat. "We check in on Monday mornings and wait in line for our turn to get the meals, which we put in coolers. Then we head out. We typically have 12 to 15 deliveries to make, and we're always greeted with a smile," says Karen, wearing one of her own. "There's this one woman who has a little dog named Pippin, and he comes out to greet us. We enjoy spending time with her. She's super – so appreciative."

So is Pippin, who benefits from SRA's Pet Meals on Wheels pro-

"We offer our clients the chance to do things themselves. We change people's lives."

– SHAWNA CALLAGHAN

gram, a collaborative effort with For the Love of Paws and the Humane Society of Vero Beach and Indian River County. For the Love of Paws donates the pet food and the Humane Society provides veterinary services. "It's so important to keep pets at home with their owners," says Karen. "For some people, taking care of their little dog or cat is their only reason to get up in the morning, the only joy in their lives."

The Pierces see that joy and note it in the "comments" section of a health assessment form on their mobile app during every visit. Once the client has signed off, they push the "send" button and the information wings its way to the SRA office. Seamless and speedy.

"Technology drives everything these days, and we want to keep up with it," Deigl points out. "In the past, we had an antiquated system based on paper; thanks to grants from the Indian River Community Foundation and Meals on Wheels National, we now have the technology we need. When our volunteers are with the client in their home, they can upload answers to questions like 'How are you feeling today?' We're getting the information and the client's signature right away."

SRA also provides social congregate meals at various county locations, including St. Francis Manor, the Red Cross and, most recently, The Salvation Army. "We needed a location in the south part of the county, and partnering with The Salvation Army, which has a food pantry, makes such sense," says Deigl. "Including home deliveries and congregate meals, we serve more than 450 people a day."

Deigl sums it up when she says, "There are a lot of logistics that go on with all the programs and services we provide, but the bottom line is that every day people were looked after, people were fed and people were loved." ❁

Senior Resource Association Programs and Services

- The Meals on Wheels program has seen a 77% increase in clients since the pandemic began. The number of meals served per month has jumped from 9,000 in 2019 to 16,000 today.
- In the Grocery Shopping Assistance program, SRA staff members shop for the groceries, collect the clients' form of payment and deliver the order back to the client the same day – at no delivery cost to seniors.
- Adult Enrichment & Respite facilities in Vero Beach and Sebastian are the only state-licensed centers in Indian River County. They are gradually reopening with new precautions, such as social distancing, in place.
- Community Coach service provides door-to-door transportation for eligible riders with no other means of transportation.
- GoLine public buses provide transportation along 15 fixed routes in Indian River County at no fee to riders.
- SRA administers an EHEAP (Emergency Home Energy Assistance for the Elderly Program) designed for Indian River County seniors who are experiencing an energy-related crisis.
- SRA provides information and resources for senior services available throughout Indian River County, including in-home services, homebound meal deliveries, caregiver respite services, home care services, and cognitive and therapeutic programs for adults of all ages.
- SRA provides guardianship services to adults of limited financial means who may be subject to abuse and neglect because they lack someone who is willing or able to protect and advocate for them.
- Silver Tones is an all-volunteer senior chorus that typically performs three concerts per year. The concerts are free to the public, and all donations support the work of SRA.



The joy SRA helps seniors and their families experience is evident in moments like this one between Renu and her mother-in-law, Pat.

