

The Volunteers of Villa Leonardo Gambin

BY JULIE ACHTERMEIER

Villa Leonardo Gambin (VLG) is a long-term care residence centrally located in Woodbridge, ON. The residence has been home to close to 800 people since it opened on October 30th, 2004. The mission of VLG is to create and celebrate a purposeful, exceptional, quality of life which is evident as soon as you walk through the front doors of this vibrant residence.

The long-term care facility provides a comfortable home for residents requiring full-time nursing care, or palliative care services. It consists of six unique residential home areas, all designed to celebrate the lives of its residents and provide a warm and inviting living space. The dining area has been created with a family atmosphere and features delicious Italian-inspired home-cooked meals.

Along with the comfortable living space is a compassionate staff and professional 24-hour-a-day

nursing care. And while VLG may have an exceptional staff, Louise Facca, Manager of Recreation and Volunteer Services, insists it's the volunteers who really make the difference.

Louise has been working at VLG for three years, but has always worked with adults with disabilities, or in long-term care homes. With her wealth of experience, she truly understands what it takes to make the residents smile, and knows first-hand what makes a great volunteer. "Volunteers feel a sense of purpose when they assist those in the community," Louise says. "Our volunteers are amazing. We couldn't manage without them." And she's clearly right. The talented volunteers who grace VLG with their generosity and love are also volunteers elsewhere in the community. It was apparent in conversation with these individuals, how much they gain by giving back to their community.



Rosa, Lucy & Neal

PHOTOS BY SAM SCIARRINO

Rosa Zago has been volunteering at VLG since its opening 13 years ago. Each week, she leads a small group rosary on two floors, and a large group rosary in the main chapel. She also assists with serving meals in the dining room, helps with weekly Bingo and accompanies residents on the occasional outing. Since she lives right next door, it's easy to pop in and lend a hand. Rosa enjoys knitting so she helps some of the residents with their knitting projects. "I love being with the residents and making a difference to the community," says Rosa. As if she wasn't busy enough at VLG, she also knits blankets and baby outfits for young Mount Sinai patients who require a special outfit for burial. While that may sound like a heart-breaking task, Rosa finds solace in bringing comfort to the families who have lost a child.

Neal Pupulin has been providing musical entertainment to the residents of VLG for the past 12 years. He's a professional musician who plays the accordion twice a month, and for special events. A full-time musician since the 1960s, Neal knows how to read a crowd and says nationality and age can tell him a lot about what kind

of music to play. Once a seasoned traveller, Neal says he prefers to be close to home these days. "In my younger days, I used to look forward to travelling," he says. "But now I've seen so many places, I enjoy being at home." In addition to his time at VLG, Neal still works to entertain crowds at Carrying Place Golf Course every Sunday during brunch.

Equally devoted is Neal's wife, Lucy Pupulin, who has been retired from her job in quality control for 11 years. Lucy has a great sense of humour when speaking of her former work, and her husband. "Since I was in quality control, I used to find all his defects," she jokes. Lucy has also been volunteering since the residence opened. In fact, her own mother was there for a number of years. She assists the residents on excursions about four times per month, and helps with the cultural program which involves a cooking demonstration in the morning, followed by an afternoon of enjoying their creations. In addition to volunteering at VLG, Lucy also helps at Wallace House, making items to donate that can be sold to raise money for various causes.



Volunteers make the world go 'round

When asked if she enjoys hearing her husband play the accordion, she is quick to nod and smile, "Unless," she adds, "I'm trying to work on a crossword puzzle!"

The generosity and good sense of humour of these volunteers is what brings a smile to the faces of so many residents at VLG. The residents, and staff, are fortunate to have such devoted people willing to give so much of their time.

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