

# Words From the WOODS

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION FROM POMPERAUG WOODS

SUMMER 2026



As spring gives way to summer, Pomperaug Woods is blooming with energy, laughter, and connection. Our residents recently enjoyed a fantastic ice cream social featuring sundaes bursting with toppings and a festive Memorial Day Picnic paired with a beautiful chamber music concert. Of course, what makes life here so special isn't just the events themselves — it's the camaraderie they inspire. Whether gathering with friends on a sunny afternoon in the Garden Room, discovering a new hobby in Creative Arts class, or simply sharing a laugh over coffee in the Café, there is joy to be found in each day and in every season of life at Pomperaug Woods.

Warmly, **Vicki Gyba-Marshall**, *Executive Director*

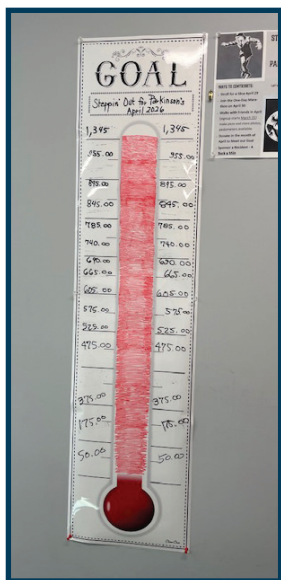
## Steppin' Out for a Good Cause: Residents Raise \$3,000 for Parkinson's

Residents laced up their walking shoes for Pomperaug Woods' first-ever Steppin' Out for Parkinson's fundraiser. Led by Wellness Coordinator Megan Boyd in partnership with the Connecticut Chapter of the American Parkinson Disease Association (APDA), for 30 days, 65 residents participated in a cumulative marathon, logging an impressive 1,462,617 steps — equal to 731 miles — and raised \$3,000 for APDA, tripling the original fundraising goal.

"Residents walked, donated, sponsored participants, and shared personal stories about loved ones with PD," said Megan Boyd. "Together, we made a real difference for an important cause."



Resident Gail Rahal's family sponsored her walking goals



Donations kept growing during the event!

Many participants found personal motivation in the challenge. "I was honored to be sponsored for a walking challenge," said resident Gail Rahal. "I exceeded my goal by walking 108 miles and helped raise \$300 through family sponsorships."

For resident Marcia Strittmatter, the fundraiser created a lasting healthy habit. "I set up a buddy system with my friend, Rita Kogstad," said Marcia. "We walked twice a week to reach our step goals. Now we continue to walk together every Friday morning. Megan has really inspired us!"

Others walked in honor of loved ones affected by Parkinson's disease. "My husband lived with PD for 7 years, so I was very happy to participate in his honor," said resident Barbara Geye. "The money raised provides education, resources, and support for those living with PD."

Resident Ronald Labrecque added, "I typically walk 2 miles a day. I want to thank my sponsors in this community. I have two people close to me with PD — my brother-in-law and a friend I've known for 60+ years. I'm glad this money will help fund research."

When residents come together around a meaningful cause, extraordinary things can happen!

# The Putnam Delivers Sun-Filled Living and Unmatched Peace of Mind

Warm, welcoming, and designed for easy living, the Putnam 1 Bed/1 Bath apartment home is thoughtfully designed for comfort and convenience. Enjoy a full kitchen, in-unit washer/dryer, spacious walk-in closet, and abundant windows that bring warmth and natural light into every day. Each day at Pomperaug Woods is designed to help you live well and enjoy more. From gourmet dining and engaging activities to attentive services and LifeCare peace of mind, this community is for dynamic, energetic seniors that have a lot of living to do. See how beautiful life can be living in the Putnam.



## Why choose Pomperaug Woods?

- Gourmet Dining
- Friendly Residents & Staff
- 5-Star Services & Amenities
- LifeCare Peace-of-Mind



**In-Person and Virtual Tours Available!**

**Schedule a visit TODAY: 203-935-3734**

# The Odyssey Delivers an Afternoon of Powerful Theater

Residents were swept away by *The Odyssey*, an original two-person theatrical performance written by Poornima Kirby and performed by Kirby and Stephen Collins. Blending music, storytelling, humor, and drama, the production reimagined Homer's epic through a modern lens, exploring timeless themes of love, resilience, longing, and the journey home. "The performance was beautiful!" said Lisa Huebenthal, Director of Community Life. "Kudos to Poornima and Stephen for the host of roles that they seamlessly inhabit. Totally captivating!"

"Performing *The Odyssey* is both thrilling and humbling," said Poornima. "This story has endured for thousands of years because it speaks to what it means to be human."

Residents praised the performance for its artistry and emotional impact.

"I was completely drawn in," said resident Joyce DeSimone. "Their singing voices were beautiful, and the talent was exceptional. I love that the performance was done right here in the community. So easy!"

Resident Dr. Ruth Holt called the production "deeply moving." "Poornima's modern interpretation made this ancient story feel profoundly relevant today," she said. "The performances were exquisite — emotional, intelligent, and incredibly versatile."

*The Odyssey* delivered an unforgettable afternoon of theater, music, and powerful storytelling.



Poornima Kirby & Stephen Collins

**Check the Activities Calendar for dates/times of upcoming entertainment events.**

# Summer Starts Here: Memorial Day Picnic Brings Everyone Together

Nothing says summer at Pomperaug Woods quite like a picnic under the big tent. “The Memorial Day picnic is the first of our three signature summer picnics,” said Lisa Huebenthal, Director of Community Life. “We also celebrate with picnics on the 4th of July and Labor Day. Our chef creates a special menu for each, and residents look forward to them all season long.”

Discovering new menu favorites is part of the fun. “There’s always something unexpected and delicious,” said resident Sam Burd. “This year it was the corn pudding — it was outstanding!”

Resident Ellie Crystal enjoyed dining outdoors. “It had all the favorites — hotdogs, hamburgers, baked beans, macaroni salad,” said Ellie. “The coffee crunch ice cream was the perfect finish.”

Resident Sandy Bell agreed. “They had two new ice cream flavors that sounded fantastic — caramel cheesecake and lemon bar,” said Sandy. “But the chef’s homemade banana pudding and chocolate torte were irresistible!”

The celebration continued after the meal with a performance by David Lane & Friends. “It was the perfect holiday afternoon,” said resident Susan Windesheim. “Wonderful food, wonderful music, and wonderful company.”

With two more picnics still to come, residents have plenty to look forward to under the big tent!



Resident Don Chin and his family

## Memorial Day Concert by David Lane & Friends Makes the Holiday Special



L to R: Rami Haxhi, Aliza Creel, and David Lane

Residents enjoyed an unforgettable Memorial Day as David Lane & Friends filled Wilson Hall with beautiful chamber music. Featuring works by Mozart, Schubert, Brahms, and Shostakovich, the performance showcased the extraordinary talents of violinist David Lane, violist Aliza Creel, and pianist Rami Haxhi. For Lane, the concert carried special meaning. His mother, Ursula Lane, has called Pomperaug Woods home for the past 2-1/2 years. “My mother and I fell in love with this community the first time we visited,” said Lane. “It’s truly a wonderful place to call home.”

Residents were equally enthusiastic. “I loved, loved, loved this concert!” said resident Lea Embree. “David

played the first movement of the Brahms sonata so beautifully.”

“I’d never heard a viola solo and was amazed by its rich, mellow sound,” said resident Mervyn Clay. “I recognized the Shostakovich selections from my favorite silent movies, so that was a happy surprise.”

“It was a rare treat to be in the audience of such an accomplished trio,” said resident Muffy Barhydt. “Please return very soon!”

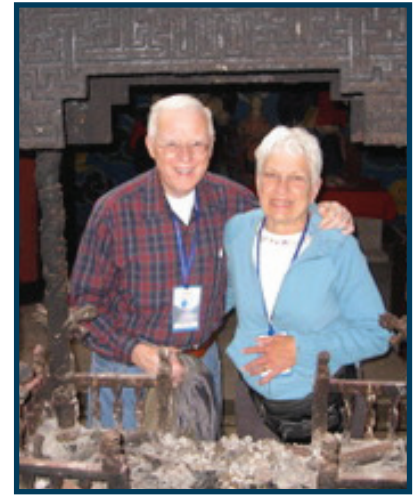
The afternoon was a joyful celebration of music, connection and community.

Check the Activities Calendar for dates/times of upcoming concerts.

# Resident Spotlight: **Lea Embree**

Lea Embree doesn't just enjoy community life — she looks for ways to shape it. She is a vibrant presence at Pomperaug Woods, sharing her talents as an artist, gardener, baker, and volunteer. For Lea, connection is something you create.

Born in Cleveland, OH, and raised on a chicken farm in Louisville, KY, Lea followed her creative instincts from Wittenberg University to Cornell University, where she met her husband, Alan. Their life together included being stationed with the Army in Germany and travels across Europe before settling back in the United States to raise their family. Along the way, Lea built a distinguished artistic career, exhibiting ceramic work at The Smithsonian and spending four decades designing educational exhibits for museums and the 1964 World's Fair. "Art has been my way of understanding the world," said Lea. "And sharing that understanding with others."



Lea and Alan Embree

After her husband's passing in 2018, Lea set out to find a place where she could continue to live with purpose. "I wanted a place where I could still give something of myself every day, and that it would matter," Lea said. Drawn to the community's welcoming atmosphere, Lea quickly made her apartment and patio garden an extension of her spirit. "I grow geraniums outside," said Lea, "and inside, I try to grow a sense of belonging."

Lea wasted no time getting involved. She volunteers both on campus and at the Southbury Food Bank, has served on multiple resident committees, performs with the Pomperaug Players drama group, attends fitness classes, and enjoys trips to museums and galleries. "I follow my curiosity," Lea said. "If something feels like it might bring people together, I say yes." Much of her impact happens in small, personal ways. She bakes cookies for staff, shares pies with neighbors, and gives away flowers and vegetables from her garden. "There is a quiet kind of joy in offering something you've made with your own hands," Lea said. "It means so much to me to add to the warmth of this community in any way I can."

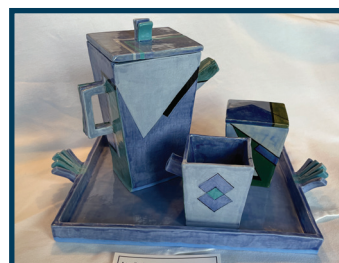
Lea's advice to anyone considering a move? "Community is something you participate in," said Lea. "And when you have the chance to give to it — to really be part of it — that's what makes a place feel like home."



Lea and her family



Lea and her favorite dog, Kelly



## Mother's Day Tea Delights Residents

More than 70 residents gathered for a truly memorable Mother's Day Tea. Tiered cake stands overflowed with finger sandwiches, quiches, and sweets, while harpist Grace Cloutier provided the musical backdrop. "Mother's Day is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the remarkable women in our community," said Lisa Huebenthal, Director of Community Life.

Residents were delighted by both the atmosphere and the entertainment. "Enjoying such a magnificent tea service accompanied by exquisite harp music allowed us all to channel our inner Duchess," said resident Lea Embree. "So much work — blessings to all on the staff!"

"I really enjoyed it!" said resident Don Chin. "It was like a High Tea experience in the Hong Kong Peninsula Hotel. The food was absolutely delicious!"

"The harpist was wonderful!" said resident Thelma Oppenheimer. "She played Broadway, jazz, classical, world music, favorite oldies. The whole afternoon was so well done."

For Cloutier, the event was equally as rewarding. "The atmosphere was just beautiful," she said. "Everyone was in a festive mood. It is always such a pleasure to perform at Pomperaug Woods."

With elegant surroundings, delicious refreshments, beautiful music, and wonderful company, the Mother's Day Tea was a fitting celebration for all the moms and an afternoon to remember.



Front: Barbara Delia and Roberta Ilardo  
Rear: Joel Abramson and Ida Ressler

## Sweet Summer Social Dishes Out Scoops of Fun

There was only one challenge at Pomperaug Woods' recent Ice Cream Social: deciding where to begin. Residents lined up to build their dream sundaes, starting with vanilla, chocolate, or coffee ice cream and then loading them up with every temptation in sight. Chocolate sauce? Of course. Whipped cream? Absolutely. Cherries, sprinkles, chocolate chips, nuts, M&Ms? Why choose when you can have them all!

Residents happily faced those delicious decisions as they built custom sundaes and settled in for an afternoon of laughter, conversation, and sweet treats with friends and neighbors.

"An ice cream social is the best way to kick off summer!" said resident Susan Windesheim.

As colorful desserts took shape, so did lively conversations. "It was fun to create my own sundae and catch up with my neighbors," said resident Ina Borenzweig.

While the ice cream was certainly a hit, the real treat was the chance to spend time together. "Who doesn't love ice cream?" said resident Greta Campbell. "I hope we have more pop-up ice cream socials in the future. Always fun to sneak in a sundae before we go to dinner."

With delicious desserts, friendly conversation, and plenty of smiles, the Ice Cream Social is the perfect recipe for sweet memories.



L to R: Irv and Ina Borenzweig, Susan Windesheim, Ida Ressler, Greta Campbell, and Betty Giorodano

# A Superstar Evening at The Goodspeed

Residents recently traveled to The Goodspeed Opera House in East Haddam for an unforgettable evening of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice's iconic rock opera. "It was a gorgeous night, a packed house, high energy from both audience and players, and a powerful performance overall," said Lisa Huebenthal, Director of Community Life. "What a wonderful night out together!"

"I had never seen *Jesus Christ Superstar* before," said resident Ronald Labrecque. "There was a heck of a lot of talent on that stage! And my wife and I both enjoyed dinner with our group before the show."

"It was a spectacular production," said resident Norma Benedict. "The acting and singing were absolutely breathtaking. From start to finish, it was phenomenal."

"Many years ago, I saw *Jesus Christ Superstar* on Broadway," said resident Mary Andrews. "Tonight's performers were outstanding, and the production was polished and professional. The Goodspeed is such a beautiful theater right on the river, and dinner at Gelston House beforehand made the evening even more special. It was a thoroughly enjoyable night!"

From the opening overture to the final curtain call, the evening was a memorable celebration of live theater, great company, and the joy of shared experiences.



L to R: Bonnie Early, Pam Paul, Sandy Kellam, Ronald & Lenora Labrecque, Lyn Atkinson, Norma Benedict, Dianna O'Connor, Lisa Huebenthal, Mary Andrews

# Full House of Fun! Saturday Poker Brings Big Laughs and Friendly Competition!



L to R: Sam Burd, Joe Longo, Joe Maciolek and Joe Regan

Every Saturday afternoon, the Garden Room is filled with friendly banter and a little playful bluffing as residents gather for the longstanding weekly poker game. The game is 7-card stud and the stakes are low — players bet dimes — but the camaraderie is priceless.

Resident Joe Regan was one of the original founders of the Saturday poker game, along with Elsie May Johnson and Jim Cooper. "We started playing together 17 years ago," said Joe. "I had never played poker before. I tried a new hobby, and I've had a ball ever since!"

"My brother taught me how to play poker when we were kids," said resident Thelma Oppenheimer, the group's only female player. "I've been playing with this group for eight years. It's always a relaxing way to spend a Saturday afternoon."

Resident Joe Longo says the game quickly became one of his favorite traditions. "I joined our group seven years ago," he said. "No one gets rich playing, but we always have a great time."

"I hadn't played poker in many years, but I was encouraged to join, and I'm glad I did," said resident Sam Burd. "It's always fun to chat a bit while we play."

**New players are always welcome. Just come to the Garden Room on Saturday at 1:00 PM — and don't forget your dimes!**

# Pomperaug Woods Congratulates Our Most Recent **Employees of the Month!**

We are so proud of our wonderful staff. Take a moment to meet our latest Employees of the Month:

## **FEBRUARY: BEN GAMBLE**

### *Dining Services*



Ben joined Pomperaug Woods in May 2024. His leadership in the kitchen keeps team members on track and ensures an exceptional dining experience for our residents at every meal.

## **APRIL: BRIELLE O'NEIL**

### *Human Resources*



Brielle joined Pomperaug Woods in October 2023. Her dedication and positive attitude shine through in everything she does, keeping employees engaged and the team moving forward.

## **MARCH: LUIS PACHECO GARCIA**

### *Culinary Department*



Luis joined Pomperaug Woods in October 2025. His professionalism and strong work ethic set the example for the culinary team, and he takes pride in every delicious dish he creates.

## **MAY: KIMBERLY MARTIN**

### *Nurse, Health Services*



Kimberly joined Pomperaug Woods in July 2023. As our overnight LPN, Kim's dedication to providing compassionate care ensures the safety and comfort of every resident in our health center.

Many thanks for making Pomperaug Woods such a special place to live and work!

## Meet **Bonnie Early**, Bringing Heart and Creativity to Community Life!

Pomperaug Woods is pleased to welcome Bonnie Early as the new Activities Department Assistant.

"As an empty nester, I knew that in this next chapter of my life I wanted to work with a community I admired and felt deeply connected to," said Bonnie. "I felt a sense of purpose immediately here. Working alongside Lisa has exceeded every expectation I had. From day one, I have been warmly embraced by everyone in the community. The staff and administration are incredibly supportive, and they make it a joy to come to work every day."

With her upbeat personality, warmth, and enthusiasm, Bonnie is already making a wonderful impression. "Getting to know residents and sharing conversations with them every day has genuinely become the highlight of my week," Bonnie said. "If I can bring residents even a small amount of happiness, then I'm doing something meaningful."

"Bonnie has been an incredible addition to our team," said Lisa Huebenthal, Director of Community Life. "Her positive energy, creativity, and genuine care make her such an asset. Bonnie's presence helps us continue to develop an even more robust Activities Calendar, which is truly the foundation for the vibrant life here at Pomperaug Woods."

Welcome to the team, Bonnie. We're so happy you joined us!



Bonnie Early

## Swap, Shop & Smile! Residents Turn Spring Cleaning into Treasure Hunting



L to R: Fran Poza, Rita Kogstad, Ellie Crystal

Spring cleaning got a fun twist during a recent Swap & Shop event. Residents were invited to clear out unwanted items and browse for new-to-them treasures. "The event was a huge success!" said Lisa Huebenthal, Director of Community Life. "Everyone came together for a fun and meaningful day of recycling, reusing, and sharing. Any remaining items were donated to a local charity in Southbury."

Resident Joel Abramson welcomed the opportunity to declutter. "I donated sport coats and clothing, kitchen utensils, pots and pans, a set of matching dishes and cups, and even a salad spinner! I'm happy for these well-loved items to find a new home."

Resident Ellie Crystal volunteered at the Jewelry Table and enjoyed watching the excitement unfold. "Everyone had a ball! People found what they've always been looking for. It was a win-win for everyone!"

"The donations were spectacular!" said resident Marcia Strittmatter. "I took home some tops and dresses and a leather wallet. Lisa deserves all the kudos. The event was so well-organized. Everything just flowed."

From decluttering to discovering hidden gems, the Swap & Shop proved that one person's unwanted item really can become another person's treasure!



Norma Benedict



Everyone enjoyed the Swap & Shop fun!