

The SOCIETY Scoop

Greetings from President and CEO, Abby Katz Starr

Welcome to 2025! As we approach the new year with well-earned optimism, I wanted to share a few updates on notable campus initiatives and strategies:

1. Status of our DementiAbility transformation

– Four months into implementation, we are receiving positive feedback from family members about the subtle yet crucial ways the training has shaped the way staff interface with residents – how they address their concerns, their questions, how they empathize when anxieties arise. Our investment in DementiAbility training is helping to provide staff with the resources they need to support residents on all levels of the cognitive spectrum, but especially those with neurocognitive disorders like dementia. We are continuing the work and will update you on our progress.

2. Advancing our Information Management and Technology Strategy – As part of our efforts to keep up with both the increasing demands for technology and more sophisticated Ministry reporting requirements, we have engaged the services of a consultant to help us determine which services best fit our needs. We are proactively researching what tools will streamline compliance and provide ease-of-use for staff so they are free to deliver the focused resident care we are known for.

3. Campus Master Plan – We are continuing to create opportunities for seniors' services as part of our campus redevelopment plan, including



advancing discussions with York Region for a Seniors Community Hub. There is much going on behind the scenes as we work to advance our ability to meet the needs of our community, and I look forward to sharing these developments with you soon.

With a growing focus on neurocognitive disorders in senior services and the use of technology to optimize operations, UHS is well-positioned to enhance care for seniors in need. We are deeply grateful to our community of supporters for helping us drive this mission forward.

Together, we are creating an environment where older adults can thrive, regardless of cognitive ability.



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Volunteer Spotlight

Sharing an Intergenerational Experience

Meet **Rosie Till**, our passionate and dedicated youth volunteer who has committed countless hours to support the residents at Union Villa LTC.

In this interview with Rosie, we learn about her motivation for volunteering and the rewarding experiences that drive her unwavering dedication to serving her community.

How long have you been a volunteer?

I started volunteering at Union Villa this past summer in August 2024 and I've been grateful to be part of the community ever since.

What is your connection to the Unionville Youth Council? What made you choose Union Villa?

I'm currently serving as vice co-chair for the Unionville Youth Council, a role I've held for two years, and this is my third year with the council overall. At one of our meetings, Lindsay, the Recreation Manager at Union Villa, joined us to share volunteer opportunities at UHS. She inspired me to get involved.



What drew you to volunteering in the first place?

I have been spending a lot of time with my grandparents, especially my grandfather who was a widower. I often called him to tell him about my day and check in, and saw how much those small moments brightened his life. That experience made me realize the profound impact young people can have on seniors' lives.

I also plan to pursue Nursing after graduation. Volunteering at Union Villa and working with the incredible staff and residents makes me feel like I made the right choice.

What makes volunteering at Union Villa so meaningful to you?

Volunteering here has allowed me to build genuine relationships that connect youth and seniors within our community. I've learned so much from the fascinating stories the residents share about their lives and the wisdom they pass on through their advice.

The staff at Union Villa are incredibly supportive and create such a welcoming environment. It's not just a place to give back; it's a space where I've grown personally and gained insights that will stay with me for a lifetime.

Do you have any message for prospective volunteers about volunteering at Unionville Home Society?

When I first started, I thought my role would mainly involve assisting with activities. But I quickly learned that the biggest impact I could make was simply by listening. My favorite moments are during one-on-one visits, where I get to hear residents' stories and offer them my full attention.

To anyone considering volunteering: be open to listening. It's such a simple act, but it can mean the world to someone. And in return, you'll gain more than you could ever imagine.

Our volunteers have been providing thoughtful and meaningful support to our seniors since 1968. For more information on the numerous rewarding volunteer experiences available, please contact Volunteer Services at volunteer@uhs.on.ca or (905) 477-2822 ex. 4261.

My Life, My Journey. A Union Villa Resident Profile

Meet Dafni Lenopulus

Dafni Lenopulus was born in 1942 in the north of Greece, which was Aegean Macedonia at the time.

During the civil war in the region, 24,000 children were displaced to Romania alone, while others went to other countries in the region. At 6 years old, Dafni, her twin sister and two brothers (13 and 11) were sent to Romania under the cover of night to avoid the bombing. They were guided by older girls (18-23) who would become the “mothers” of the displaced children.

Dafni and her family were taken in by the Romanian government along with 1,600 other children. The Romanian government fed them, took care of their medical needs, and brought in teachers to school them in 5 languages: Romanian, Macedonian, Greek, French and Russian. She lived in the orphanage from 6 – 13. After that the children were sent to different high schools or technical schools. Dafni’s siblings were broken up but kept in touch with letters, telegrams and phones at the post office.

After finishing the next level of education, the children (now teenagers and young adults) were able to find work. Many Macedonian girls going to the same school were housed together in old buildings with subsidized housing. Dafni lived with 16 girls in one of these houses, where the girls often stayed until they got married.

Dafni married her husband George at 29. He was a friend of a friend. Later that year, she had her only child, Dorothy. Five years later, the family immigrated to Canada. The Macedonian children had no passports and were not Romanian citizens, so Dafni and her family were refugees. Without English or French, it was very difficult living in their new home, and the family had to work very hard to make ends meet. Dafni worked the evening shift in a factory, George the morning shift so someone would be home to care for Dorothy.



Dafni learned how to speak English by going to the library every day and with these skills she was able to get a better job working for Motorola.

They were able to buy a small house and Dafni found she loved gardening, growing vegetables, and enjoying family life. George had a steady job at the factory and eventually retired with a pension. Later, an unexpected sickness befell George, making it hard for him to live independently. They found their first LTC but it was not a good fit. Dorothy was a nurse and recommended that they apply to Union Villa, and they have lived here ever since.

Dafni shares that she is not here for herself, she is here for George but does like her new home and the staff. She is very grateful for the variety of social activities that keep her engaged. Dafni loves it when her two grandchildren visit and says she feels very lucky in life.

Continuing Our Journey Towards a New Model of Care

In the Fall of 2024, UHS announced our decision to implement a new care model designed to support the needs of all residents, particularly those with neurocognitive disorders like dementia.

Our mission remains steadfast: residents are entering care with greater and more complex needs, and homes like ours are already facing increased demands on staff and resources to provide quality care projected for the next 5–10 years. Often, what is perceived as dementia is actually a result of lack of engagement, boredom, and loneliness.

Investing in DementiAbility's person-centred care model aligns directly with our mission to create a Home where residents have the support they need to age well and live better. We foster an environment where staff embrace the mindset that "we work in their home; they don't live where we work."

Since the fall, the implementation of DementiAbility in our Home has focused on the specific ways staff interact with residents. Language is crucial. The brain changes associated with dementia affect behaviour and responses, but residents across the neurocognitive spectrum will notice the difference between being asked, "what unit are you from?" versus "what neighbourhood do you live on?" Changing language requires time, reinforcement, and team effort, but staff now better understand its importance.

We are also introducing memory training exercises using wayfinding signage as part of the DementiAbility journey. With wayfinding signs, such as symbols indicating the location and order of clothing items in closets and drawers, we can re-teach individuals with dementia to perform everyday tasks, boosting their independence and sense of self. Other signs direct residents to the spa, dining room, activity room, and more. Consistent cueing from multiple staff members



reinforces the memory of these signs and their use, supporting overall memory training.

Our Recreation Department has integrated DementiAbility activities into their regular programming that involve household tasks like folding towels or organizing clothespins, helping residents reconnect with domestic routines from their past. Previously, resident engagement relied solely on Recreation Staff. With this new model of care, staff from all departments are equipped to provide engagement opportunities. Housekeeping staff might invite a resident to sweep for a few minutes, while a PSW might encourage them to pick up a book from the activity cart or take a few minutes to read to them.

Thanks to our research partnership with Seneca Polytechnic, which guided us in selecting DementiAbility as our new care model, we know these methods and tools will reduce responsive

behaviours and help residents regain or maintain their strengths and abilities. We are committed to building a future for all residents that is more supportive, positive, and meaningful.

Kaitlyn, UHS's Behavioural Supports Ontario Nurse (BSO), says, "The key is understanding that even as we implement these systems, what works for one person may not work for another. Each person requires an individual plan. But the beauty of group training is that more staff now understand why responsive or repetitive behaviours occur and how small changes can have a significant impact."

We look forward to sharing more updates as we continue to incorporate DementiAbility methods into our culture, operations, and environment. Thank you to all our supporters and staff who have helped us advance our goal of providing enhanced resident experiences that truly feel like home.



A Snapshot of Client Experiences on Campus



Adult Day Program clients enjoy 1:1 support during creative, therapeutic activities.



Union Villa resident reads *Address to a Haggis* on Robbie Burns Day.



Residents had fun bidding on silent auction items that were generously donated.



Congratulations to the UHS staff who received bursaries thanks to The Crosby Family Education Fund. Established in 2021, the fund is in memory of Glenn's wife Pam, a former UHS resident and teacher, to honor Pam's commitment to education. These bursaries provide opportunities for UHS staff to further their careers in seniors services.

(L-R): Glenn Crosby, President and CEO Abby Katz Starr, Kim Zhang, Hana Phan, Abarnan Mehavarnan, Jennifer Jiang, UHS Board Member David Rackus, UHS Board Chair Philip Gunn.)

Save the Date - 2025 Fundraising Events

The Unionville Home Society Foundation is thrilled to announce two upcoming fundraisers where your passion for **Gardens** and **Golf** can make a meaningful difference.

Join us in an upcoming fundraiser and help us raise funds to expand our dementia-friendly program throughout our home and improve the physical environment of our dementia care unit. Research has shown that the design of the physical environment and specialized programming can calm the common stressors caused by dementia and enhance the well-being and independence of our residents.

Unionville Home Society
Foundation presents



THURSDAY APRIL 24, 2025

Angus Glen Golf Club

**GROWING
COMMUNITY**

Join us in our efforts to enhance Union Villa's sensory garden & support residents' horticultural therapy.

SCHEDULE

- 9:30 a.m.** Registration & Spring Shopping in our Marketplace
- 12 noon** Floral Demonstration, followed by Lunch and our Special Guest Speaker Mark Cullen

TICKETS

- Early bird (until April 4): \$90**
Regular (after April 4): \$110

FEATURING

Kate Seaver



ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Mark Cullen is Canada's favorite gardening expert and best-selling author, having written 24 books. Mark will be sharing his passion for Canada's most popular outdoor leisure activity and the impact of gardening on our lives and the greater community.

Golf Fore Union Villa

Unionville Home Society
Foundation presents



2025
UNIONVILLE
CHARITY GOLF CLASSIC
Tuesday, July 8, 2025

ANGUS GLEN GOLF CLUB SOUTH COURSE
7:00 am Registration | **8:00 am** Shotgun start

TICKETS

Per golfer... \$300
Early bird foursome (until June 20)... \$1,100
Foursome (after June 20)... \$1,200

Includes: 18 Holes of golf with cart, Continental breakfast, Lunch, Passport of activities

In support of Union Villa Long Term Care





For more information on participation, sponsorship, or making a donation, please contact the Foundation office at (905) 477-2822 ext. 4270 or by email at mdimson@uhs.on.ca.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

**portion of ticket fees may be eligible for a tax receipt, subject to CRA guidelines*

Charitable Registration #87172 1940 RR0001

Our Mission

Engaging our communities through a continuum of services that enhances the experience of aging.

Our Vision

A progressive community where older adults thrive, age well and live better.