

## ENRICHING SENIOR LIVES

### At Lions Gate, friends become family

Enriching Senior Lives-Philosopher Criss Jami once said, "We often hear about stepping outside ourselves, but rarely about stepping outside our generation."

When I think about what that statement is trying to convey, I can't help but think about how my job tackles that truism head-on. The staff that works at Lions Gate steps outside of themselves every day to care for others. From the housekeeping team to the nursing and caregiving teams, every single person working in our community makes the health and welfare of the residents their top priority. No matter what they have going on in their personal lives, they step outside of themselves to better the lives of our residents. It's really a beautiful thing.

But you know what's even more beautiful...when residents and staff step outside of their generation to develop genuine friendships. According to an AARP survey, nearly four in ten adults (37%) have a close friend who is at least 15 years older or younger than they are. Surprisingly, intergenerational friendships are equally common among men and women. Almost half (45%) of close intergenerational friendships have lasted at least 10 years and one in five (20%) has lasted for more than two decades. Survey respondents said that they value the perspective that friends of a different age can provide, and younger adults said that they are often inspired by their older friends, whom they view as role models.

According to an article in The Washington Post, "a growing body of research shows friends are essential to a healthy life—and they are just as important for our well-being as healthy eating habits or a good night's sleep." It's true! People with strong friendships not only tend to have better mental health, but studies suggest they also have better physical health, too. Researchers have found that large social networks actually lower our risk of premature death MORE than exercise or dieting alone.

While studies have shown that residing in a senior living community can extend a senior's life by seven years, we chalk up the benefits of social-

ization to the friendships residents make with their peers. But I would hypothesize that the unique intergenerational friendships residents often make with the staff here at Lions Gate are equally as vital to their health and happiness.

Being part of the Lions Gate



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family for so many years, I arrive on campus each day to be greeted by my many adopted grandmas. We are family, and that is not a word that I use lightly.

We don't just talk to each other, we really listen. We share our life stories with each other. They've heard all about my children, and I've heard about theirs. I know what jokes make them laugh, what holiday is their favorite, and what TV show they're currently watching. Stepping outside my generation to develop these special friendships has made such a genuine difference in my life, so I wanted to take a peek at some other intergenerational friendships to be found in our community.

Pat and Ronya:

Pat Sabo never expected to strike up a close friendship with someone half her age, but life has a way of sending you the people you need in your life at just the right time.

"I moved into the Lions Gate's Assisted Living community when I was 76," said Pat. "My daughter helped my husband and I get settled in at Lions Gate, but it was all so new and unfamiliar. Then I met Ronya, and she was just lovely. She is a wonderful nurse...very efficient and knowledgeable. She took the time to get to know me and brought that little extra kindness to every conversation we had. The two of us have become genuine friends, and that was exactly what I needed. She's so reassuring and supportive."

"At the end of my shift, Pat

and I chat," said Ronya Kauterman, a 15-year staff member at Lions Gate, "and we found out we have so much in common. Pat is someone special to me. I'm just grateful to be part of her life."

For Pat and Ronya, there's always something to bond over. "We talk about our kids a lot," said Pat. "Ronya and I just swapped stories of how we met our husbands. Both of our husbands were out on dates with other girls when they met us. Different eras, same happily-ever-after. We got a big laugh out of it."

"We take the time to listen to each other," said Ronya. "She loves everyone, and that makes it easy to love her in return. I've met all of Pat's children and grandchildren. Before you know it, we were all family to



Lions Gate resident Pat Sabo and Lions Gate staff member Ronya Kauterman know how meaningful an intergenerational friendship can be.

each other."

Claire and Carmelina:

Carmelina Ehinger is the concierge at Lions Gate, so you know she has her finger on the pulse of the Independent Living community. "It's my job to know everyone's name, everyone's apartment number, and everyone's phone number," laughed Carmelina. "I know who's getting their apartment painted, who is celebrating a birthday, and who is just back from vacation. Residents come to me with questions, with problems, and with warm cookies when they've just made a fresh batch. I love 'em all, but there are a few that have a special place in my heart."

One of those special to Carmelina is resident Claire Drachman. "Carm is a doll," said Claire. "I met her on the

very first day I moved in. She is so kind, and caring, and compassionate, and she immediately made me feel comfortable here. Carmelina is the biggest asset Lions Gate has because she knows how to solve anything. She handles everything like a trooper. She always has a 'keep calm and carry on' attitude."

"Claire and I just click," said Carmelina. "She makes me laugh every single time I talk to her. At 94 years old, she has the funniest, sunniest attitude of anyone I know. Just hilarious."

"I was blessed to have just one child," said Claire. "My son is everything to me. My daughter-in-law and three grandchildren are the lights of my life. But they can't be expected to be here every day entertaining me. A girl has to have her girlfriends she can talk to. Carmelina is one of my true friends. I love her to bits!"

for her, and she makes us this amazing banana bread. Shirley Srolowitz will stop in and fold some napkins and chat. They're all lovely. But then one day Jerry walks in, introduces himself, and asks me if he can have a job setting up the dining room. Here is a man who has put in a lifetime of hard work to take care of his family, and now that he's retired, he's offering to set up the entire dining room simply because he wants to help. He's just the sweetest guy."

"Chris is really great," smiled Jerry. "She invited me to come to the daily dining staff meeting. We meet every day at 11 a.m., go over the menu and plans for the day, and then I get to work setting up. She really makes me feel part of the team."

"He's not just part of the team," said Chris. "We made Jerry Employee of the Month."

"That's true," said Jerry. "She really did. It made my day."

"Jerry is the guy that if he sees there is a new resident that just moved in, he'll go over and introduce himself, and invite them to sit with him at dinner," said Chris. "You will never find a kinder person than Jerry."

"Awww, well I just try to be welcoming," said Jerry. "I'm happy to help people. We all need to look after each other."

I think what Jerry Stein said really sums up how I feel about my personal friendships with the residents at Lions Gate. We all need to look after each other. When we develop those caring bonds, they end up enriching our lives in so many surprising ways. I hope these three stories of intergenerational friendships remind you how important it is to tend to your own friendships. By providing unconditional love and support, your closest friends can change your life for the better. Thank your friends for all the joy they bring to your life, make the effort to reach out to new friends that cross your path, and remember to embrace the unexpected intergenerational friendships that may find you one day. If you're lucky enough to find an adopted bubbe and zayde like me, then you will be very lucky indeed.

Want to learn more about Lions Gate?

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Jerry and Chris:

Jerry Stein may almost be 90 years old, but he is still a doer. When he moved to Lions Gate, he met lots of new friends and enjoyed all the activities, but he found he was looking for something more. "I have the time," said Jerry. "I thought I'd really like to help out in the dining room. So, I went and had a talk with Chris."

Chris Neff, the Independent Living dining supervisor, was touched. "I host in the dining room every night," said Chris. "All the residents know me, and I know every single one of them. They're all wonderful, but you develop special little relationships with a few. Ruth Gross means everything to the dining staff. And then there's Muriel Adler. I have the kitchen staff save any leftover bananas