



Residents Express Their Thanks for VHRC Staff

Last week, VHRC staff received an early holiday treat. Each hourly staff member in all communities at VHRC received an appreciation check from VHRC's residents and family members.

"For me, it was exciting to see my co-workers receive their checks. Everyone was happy to go pick up their checks, but once they had the check in hand, they were all smiles and very, very happy," said Analisse Vasquez Soto, administrative assistant for Vinson Hall. "It is so kind and generous of our residents to even consider making a contribution to the Employee Appreciation Fund," continued Analisse. "For many of us this check is a great help – it allows us to buy some extra groceries for the holidays or to put the money toward some long-term goal or wish."

Appreciation checks are a tradition at VHRC. "Since we are a tipping-free campus, this is our way to say thank you," explained Mitzi Halla, chair of Employee Appreciation Fund. "And from the number of thank you's we get, this tells me that the Appreciation Fund is important to staff too."

This year was Mitzi's third year as chair of the Employee Appreciation Fund Committee. Mitzi said that every year the method for collecting the money and distributing the checks improves. Mitzi



Analisse Vasquez Soto picks up her Appreciation check from Mitzi Halla, chair of VH/WO Employee Appreciation Fund.

credited Bonnie O'Donnell, accounting manager, who helps with the Appreciation Fund. Bonnie, in turn complimented Mitzi.

"Mitzi does a great job. I've been helping with this fund since before Willow Oak was built, and at that time, with fewer residents, it was a little less complicated. Now it is a monumental task. The Residents' Association is lucky to have someone like Mitzi who is willing to take it on."

New this year, Vinson Hall and Willow Oak residents received a form that allowed them to indicate if they wished to contribute to either ABP or TS's staff appreciation fund. "We wanted to establish a smooth and friendly approach to allow Vinson Hall and Willow Oak residents to contribute to ABP and TS staff – a one-campus approach." said Bud Dougherty, who co-chairs the ABP/TS Family Council.

World Traveler

Jo Gurnee-Hoffman was born with the travel bug. "I don't know where it came from, none of my siblings had it," says Jo, the youngest of eight children who grew up on a dairy farm in Ireland. "Travel was always the thing that interested me." So after school, she sought out a job with Royal Dutch Shell in order to travel – and was sent to Iran. "I was a 21-year-old administrative assistant with all these presidents of oil companies forming a consortium. It was the most exciting thing – Iran is beautiful!"

While there, she met Herb Gurnee, an American naval officer. When he was transferred to Hawaii, Jo joined him. "The first day I stepped off that plane in Oahu, I thought I'd died and gone to heaven!" After their island wedding, Jo kept busy modeling in fashion shows and hula dancing professionally. As a Navy wife, she also helped raise funds to build Vinson Hall. Twenty years later, a career move took the Gurnees to Washington, D.C. – and within months, Herb died of a heart attack. To help her cope with grief, a friend urged her to join a gym. Surprisingly, says Jo, "I got hooked – and I've been working out ever since! We laugh, though, because my friend's never been back!"

Through other gym friends, she met her second husband, Tom Hoffman, an army major general. "Tom and I traveled the world – India, Egypt, China, Africa, South America, Australia. "I've been truly blessed," says Jo, "though I've had tragedy



Jo Gurnee-Hoffman looks forward to traveling again. For now she enjoys VHRC's Fitness Center and online yoga.

as well," having lost her only son to a heart attack in his 30s and then Tom six years ago. Her passion for exercise has helped get her through difficult times, including COVID. She never missed a day working out in the VHRC gym this year or doing online yoga. Still, Jo is eager to get out her passport again. "I hope to go to Ireland again next fall," she says. "I'm grateful for all the traveling I've done, but I still want to keep going!"

The Campus Voice

This publication is created for Vinson Hall Retirement Community in an effort to inform and delight. This publication is produced by the Office of Philanthropy and Engagement, but attempts to reflect the work and efforts of all VHRC residents and staff.

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