

The Good Life

Health, Home and Garden Guide

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About the Cover: Camille & Kristy Unruh unload plants from a new shipment at Busy Bee Nursery in Macon.

THE
DISPATCH

Saturday, April 4, 2026

House hunting in the Golden Triangle

Locals weigh budgets, compromises while navigating process to purchase home

By **Cadence Harvey**
charvey@cdismatch.com

After touring 50 homes in a month, working through two real estate agents and making offer after offer on houses that didn't pan out, Rachel Jordan is preparing to close on her new home in April.

"It cannot get here fast enough," she said, laughing. "I'm so excited. I cannot wait to be in my house."

Though it's a relief to be close to the finish line, Jordan said the process of buying a home, even having done it once before, was a learning experience, one that mirrors what many others in the Golden Triangle are navigating.

For most, that process will start with a number.

Teresa Brooks, a Starkville Properties Realtor with more than 20 years of experience, said the first step in the home-buying process is finding a mortgage lender and getting pre-approved for a loan, which determines what buyers can realistically afford and how competitive they can be when making an offer.

She recommends a minimum credit score of about 640, though some programs offered through the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Federal Housing Administration can provide loans to people with much lower scores.

"What the credit people and lenders are looking for is an established, consistent record of making your payments on time and paying the money back,"



Cadence Harvey/Dispatch Staff

Rachel Jordan and Jessica Bell, a real estate agent with RE/MAX Partners, speak in the kitchen of a home listed for sale in Caledonia. Jordan is preparing to close on a home in April after touring 50 homes in a month and balancing budgets and compromises throughout the home-buying process.

she said.

From there, she suggests buyers find a local, full-time Realtor with positive reviews, and let the search begin.

Jordan brought along a short wish list to dozens of homes before she found the near-perfect fit for her, her husband, 20 cats, one dog and 60 chickens. While she set out for four bedrooms, a privacy fence, a nice bathtub and a functional kitchen, all under \$300,000, in the end, she conceded the bathtub and stretched her budget by about \$15,000.

Thinking on what advice she has for prospective home-buyers, Jordan says buyers should "stick to what they want" as best they can.

"Don't give in, because I did give in on some of the other houses we

had put offers in on, and I now see that with getting this house, I wouldn't have been happier in those other houses," she said. "... Take the time to look at everything out there."

That tension between must-haves and nice-to-haves is a defining part of the home search, one that Carter Lawyer is still navigating.

Since moving from California to Starkville last August, Lawyer and his family have been renting while searching for a more permanent home. Since January, they've toured between 15 and 20 properties, looking for something larger.

His wish list includes more than 2,600 square feet, close to an acre, four bedrooms and an office for about

See **HOUSE HUNTING**, 3



Cadence Harvey/Dispatch Staff

A for sale sign, listed by Jessica Bell, a real estate agent with RE/MAX Partners, is planted outside of a Caledonia home. Bell said many first-time buyers she works with come into the home-buying process thinking it is as simple as choosing a house and signing paperwork, only to realize there are multiple steps and decisions to make along the way.



Cadence Harvey/Dispatch Staff

Jessica Bell, a real estate agent with RE/MAX Partners, speaks with prospective buyer Rachel Jordan while pointing to shelves lining the walls of an enclosed patio in a home listed for sale in Caledonia. Bell recommends anyone going through the homebuying process find a local Realtor they trust to help walk them through the sometimes stressful process.

House hunting

Continued from Page 2

\$500,000. But like Jordan, he's had to prioritize.

"You can't add on more lot, so getting on the right parcel of land is important," he said. "Either an updated master or an updated kitchen is really important, one or the other. ... Some things we can live with (are) maybe a smaller square footage than what we're in today, or maybe not a fully fixed up back yard."

After the search

Once a buyer finds a home that fits their priorities, an offer is made, negotiated and, if accepted, followed by a home inspection, typically within about 10 days. That inspection evaluates major systems like the roof, plumbing, electrical work and foundation integrity. If issues arise, buyers can renegotiate or walk away.

After that, lenders finalize the loan, order an appraisal and clear any title issues before closing, a process that usually takes about 30 days from con-

tract to completion.

"The whole process can kind of seem overwhelming," said Jessica Bell, a real estate agent with RE/MAX Partners in Columbus. "It's been my experience that most clients can ... get scared because of the fear of the unknown."

Bell said many first-time buyers come in thinking the process is as simple as choosing a house and signing paperwork, only to realize there are multiple steps and decisions to make along the way. Having a real estate agent, she said, helps guide buyers through those moments.

That guidance can also be valuable in understanding a market that continues to shift.

Interest rates, which rose from between 2% and 3% during the pandemic to north of 7% in 2024, have begun to settle back to about 5%, changing how buyers approach their searches.

Along with the difference in interest rates, Lawyer said the "hidden costs" of purchasing a home, including prop-

erty taxes and home insurance, was an unexpected part of the process, tacking on an additional \$5,000 to \$10,000 in excess costs.

From March 2025 to this year, the average sold price for a home in Starkville came out to about \$366,000. In Columbus, that amount is \$246,000 and in West Point, the average comes out to about \$198,000.

Across the board, Brooks said a brand new starter home of about 1,500 square feet runs between \$350,000 and \$375,000, with that cost shooting up between \$250 and \$300 per square foot for more "upscale homes."

While the searching, the compromises and the numbers were challenging, ultimately, it was worth the wait for Jordan, and Lawyer isn't far behind.

"I think the patience of it (is the hardest part)," he said. "Waiting for the right thing to pop up, getting in to see something. ... (I) would love for it to be over (and) would love to delete the Zillow app and quit looking at homes."

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Photos by Ashlynd King/The Dispatch

LEFT: Gina McLean, owner and operator of Penick Forest Products and Penick Organics, shows the composition of their “Digger’s Delight,” one of the company’s top sellers. McLean said that her father, Gene Penick, spent decades researching soils in order to develop their formulas. Penick Organics is a wholesale soil producer based in Macon. **ABOVE:** Bryant Byrd, manager of Walton’s Greenhouse in Columbus, loads Penick products into a shopper’s truck. Penick is one of their best selling soil products according to Byrd, and he recommends the Loamate Soil Enricher as a high-quality soil amendment.

Good dirt is the secret to successful gardens

Macon company has been bagging quality soil for 50+ years

By Ashlynd King
aking@cdispatch.com

Yellowing azaleas and gardenias dying from the top down. Vegetable gardens with uneven yields and flowers dropping blooms before they open. Patchy grass that won’t reseed and shrubs with sunburnt leaves.

Problems like these can quickly put a damper on your garden dreams, plus, it’s hard to know what the issue is.

According to the experts at Penick Organics, a local wholesale manufacturer of mulch and soil, the problem likely isn’t your lack of a green thumb – it’s your soil.

“So many people spend a lot of money on plants,” said Gina McLean, owner and operator of Penick Organics. “And they want the cheapest soil to put it in, and then they don’t have good results. Soil is so important – that’s where your plants are going to live.”

Penick Organics has been formulating high-quality, organic soils in Macon for decades. McLean’s father, Gene Penick, founded the company in the 1970s as a fence post facility before he started selling byproducts as mulch. After a decade of shipping mulch around the country, Penick shifted into soil research, eventually launching Penick Organics.

They used trial and error to develop their most popular products and soon found a star ingredient: cotton-gin byproduct, commonly called gin trash. McLean said its consistent availability and ability to boost nutrients above other composts makes it invaluable.

Bryant Byrd, manager of Walton’s Greenhouse in Columbus, a local supplier of Penick, agreed their ingredients and methods make a big difference in their soil quality.

“(Penick) loamate is probably one of the best soil amendments on the market,” Byrd said. “It has the composted cotton burr, which is great for breaking up hardpan clay. Half of Mississippi is clay – red clay – which plants just do not thrive in, especially when they’re initially planted.”

‘So many people spend a lot of money on plants. And they want the cheapest soil to put it in, and then they don’t have good results. Soil is so important – that’s where your plants are going to live.’

Gina McLean, owner and operator of Penick Organics

Byrd said clay holds water like a bowl, leading to root rot. Sandy soils quickly lose water and nutrients, causing wilting. According to Mississippi State University, Mississippi soils are generally less than 2% organic matter by weight, while productive soil contains 3% to 6%. Not to mention the ideal soil pH is between 6.0-7.0. Byrd said all of these factors make it hard for plants to thrive when planted straight into the

See *SOIL*, 7

Soil

Continued from Page 6

ground. But, how do you figure out what your soil is made of? And what can be done to fix it?

“A soil test is crucial,” Byrd said. “You need to know the pH, you need to know the composition — do you have clay, loam or sand? If someone comes in and they’re just having a ton of trouble, the first thing I ask is ‘Have you tested your soil?’”

Byrd and McLean agree testing through the MSU Extension Office is one of the easiest and most affordable options. At just \$10 per soil test, it’s worth the extra effort and could possibly save gardeners from having to replace plants repeatedly.

“Soil is complex, but we’re here to help,” says Vivian Cade, MSU Lowndes County Extension coordinator. “Whether someone has questions about how to collect and package their soil, or how to submit their sample, our Extension agents can help.”

Cade says anyone can pick up a soil testing box at their county extension during open hours. Agents can provide advice on how to correctly collect your sample. After collection, bring back your sample to the office, or drop it in the mail. She says it should take around 2-4 weeks to get the results back. If the results look like scientific gibberish, Cade said don’t worry. Extension agents can help you interpret the test.

With that knowledge in hand, Byrd says the team at Walton’s will be ready to help you find the chemicals and amendments needed to have your most successful year in the garden yet.

“Make those amendments and you’ll have sustained soil health,” Byrd said. “The investment you make into your garden will pay off.”



Photos by Ashlynd King/The Dispatch

ABOVE: Penick Organics ships “tens of thousands of pounds” of soil and mulch throughout the South, according to owner and operator Gina McLean. McLean says you can find their products throughout the Golden Triangle at county cooperatives, Bloomers in Caledonia or Walton’s Greenhouse in Columbus. **LEFT:** Mississippi State University offers soil testing for \$10 a sample through their extension offices. Vivian Cade with the Lowndes County Extension says that soil testing is much easier than it may seem and extension agents are eager to help gardeners utilize the service. Cade encourages gardeners to pick up a soil testing box at their county extension during open hours.

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Get Better.

Backyard chicken keeping becoming more popular

'It's a nod and a step toward self-sustainability'

By Zack Plair
zplair@cdispatch.com

Over a dozen years of Colin and Heather Reynolds keeping backyard chickens, they have vastly upgraded the birds' accommodations.

They started mostly free range with small coops. Then came the hawks. Even after moving them to bigger, covered pens, opossums and raccoons found their way inside, necessitating adding electric wire to the pens to keep those predators at bay.

"The raccoons will pull the chickens' heads through the wire and just eat the heads off," Heather said. "We had a mink (once), and he was getting into one of the coops, so we had to put concrete at the bottom. ... He killed for sport."

Since starting in 2014, the Reynoldses believe they have lost 30 or so chickens just to predators, while learning by trial and error how to keep them out. Though they have substantially mitigated their losses over that time, they still don't always win.

"Nature is smarter than you," Colin said. "Just when you think you have it figured out, something else happens."

Still, they keep between 12 and 20 hens at any given time in their backyard on Highway 50 in Columbus. Despite the occasional frustration. Despite the expense that makes people ask them, "Is it worth it?"

"If you put it on a spreadsheet, no," Colin said. "But it's more than just eggs. ... They're our chickens. We know what



Colin Reynolds holds one of the hens he keeps in his backyard on Highway 50 in Columbus. He and his family keep as many as 20 chickens for eggs.

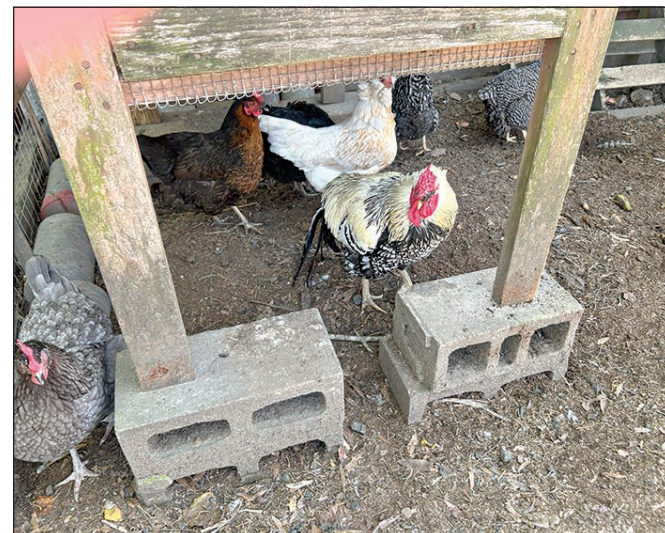
'But it's more than just eggs. ... They're our chickens. We know what they get fed. We know what we're eating.'

Colin Reynolds

they get fed. We know what we're eating."

"It's hobby farming. ... It's a nod and a step toward self-sustainability," Heather added, not-

See **CHICKENS, 11**



A few chickens belonging to Colin and Heather Reynolds mill around in their pen. The Reynolds family keeps between 12 and 20 chickens in their backyard on Highway 50, collecting their eggs and using their manure to fertilize the family garden.

Zack Plair/Dispatch Staff

Chickens

Continued from Page 10

ing the chickens eat food scraps, produce eggs and provide manure for the family's no-till garden.

The "hobby" has caught on in the area since the COVID-19 pandemic, said Jeff Hays, general manager of Lowndes County Farm Supply.

The store sold as many as 800 baby chicks a year during the height of the pandemic. Those sales winnowed off to a point where Hays doesn't carry them anymore, though other farm supply stores still do.

But chicken feed sales have continued to soar Hays, indicating the lifestyle took hold for many customers.

"I started out in the feed business in 1984," Hays said. "It's just amazing to me ... how much chicken feed sales have increased. I would say we sell probably 500 bags of chicken feed a month. I can remember the days you were lucky to sell 50 bags in a month. It's unreal."

Most families start with five or so hens, Hays said, and they need feed, feeders, water stations and maybe a heat lamp to get going, along with some type of enclosure. A pre-fab kit for coops and runs can cost hundreds of dollars, and Hays said you will come out ahead building your own.

But, like the Reynoldses, you have to realize you won't save money raising chickens for eggs.

"Especially with young families, it helps to show the kids where things come from, teach them some responsibility and a little something about agriculture," Hays said. "But it's like gardening. ... You can buy it most certainly cheaper than you can raise it, but it's the satisfaction of getting back to your heritage, so to speak, and the security of knowing you've got your own food."

Hays has also seen plenty of people give up, either when their hens quit laying after five or six years, or when "they've got too many hens and they're giving away eggs at church every Sunday morning."

"What people have to realize, it's a lot like milking a cow," he said. "You've got to tend to (chickens) every day."

Brynn Mathis, a salesperson at Lowndes County Farm Supply who also keeps chickens on Highway 50 in Columbus, said backyard farmers can usually order whatever



Zack Plair/Dispatch Staff

Jeff Hays, general manager for Lowndes County Farm Supply, grabs a bag of chicken feed at the store off Military Road in North Columbus. He said he has seen feed sales soar in recent years as more customers are keeping backyard chickens.

'What people have to realize, it's a lot like milking a cow. You've got to tend to (chickens) every day.'

Jeff Hays, general manager of Lowndes County Farm Supply

er breed of hens they want. But she advised the more exotic breeds are harder to raise and are more prone to health problems. Common standbys, like Rhode Island Red, Dominecker and Leghorn, are better layers and usually have fewer issues.

And you don't have to have a big yard or

live in a rural setting to raise chickens.

Inside Columbus city limits, law allows residents to keep chickens, and even roosters, as long as they stay on your property and don't violate the noise or noxious odor ordinance.

In Starkville, a resident can keep up to five hens, depending on the size of their yard, but no roosters.

Colin Reynolds advocates strongly for anyone interested in keeping chickens to "start somewhere." What they will find, he said, is plenty of folks willing to share their wisdom and experience.


"We've made friends," he said. "That's the other thing. Chicken friends and chicken networks."

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WHERE WILL YOU GO FOR SAFETY?



Help for new mothers goes well beyond hospital walls

Local programs, services offer resources, community and mental health care during and after pregnancy

By Emma McRae
emcrae@cdispatch.com

Between doctor's visits, sleepless nights and new routines, pregnancy and early motherhood can be overwhelming. But it doesn't have to be isolating, especially when it comes to finding the right resources.

Across the Golden Triangle, organizations and initiatives aim to connect mothers with those resources, guidance and the support of other women with shared experience.

"Research shows that people are more successful when they are learning and growing in a shared environment," said Jennifer Briggs with the Lowndes County Health Department. "So moms come together who are all working through things ... (and) they can help each other."

That philosophy guides the support provided by the Lowndes County Making an Impact in the Lactation Community, or MILC, League. The organization provides support and education on breastfeeding and early motherhood as well as infant weight checks.

Briggs, a board-certified lactation consultant who helps lead the program, said one of the biggest benefits is the support mothers in the group provide each other.

"There's a bond among the



Ashlynd King/Dispatch Staff

Diapers, wipes and baby bibs are pictured on a party favor table during the Lowndes County MILC League's one-year anniversary celebration in February. Along with providing materials, the MILC League also offers support and education on breastfeeding and infant weight checks for new mothers.

'Research shows that people are more successful when they are learning and growing in a shared environment. So moms come together who are all working through things ... (and) they can help each other.'

Jennifer Briggs, Lowndes County Health Department

members," she said. "When people come, they are part of a community."

The MILC League meets at 3:30 p.m. on Thursdays in the conference room at the Frank P. Phillips Memorial YMCA. Even one visit can make a difference, Briggs said.

"If you come in one time ...

you're going to hear something that helps you or see something that inspires you," she said. "... If we help somebody one time and that's all they need, that's amazing. If they need help weekly for 18 months, we can do that too."

Briggs said the MILC League falls under the umbrella of the

Healthy Start program, a statewide initiative that provides personalized support and clinical care to mothers before, during and after pregnancy.

Another statewide effort, organized in the wake of Mississippi's infant mortality crisis, provides expecting mothers with a free six-month supply of prenatal vitamins through county health departments.

"The goal there is to help replace mothers' stores of nutrients and kind of give them a little extra during those first few weeks (of pregnancy when) ... it may be hard to keep food down," Briggs said.

See **MOTHERS**, 15



Ashlynd King/Dispatch Staff

ABOVE: Mothers in the Lowndes County MILC League listen alongside their infants during the organization's one-year anniversary celebration in February. Jennifer Briggs, a board-certified lactation consultant who helps lead the program, said one of its most important aspects is the peer support mothers in the group provide to each other. **RIGHT:** Christina Chunn blows bubbles for, from left, Teaghan Pressley, 18 months, and Emmett Baucom, 1, during the one-year anniversary celebration for the Lowndes County MILC League in February. The MILC League is a free program for pregnant, postpartum and breastfeeding mothers that meets weekly at the Frank P. Phillips Memorial YMCA in Columbus.



Mothers

Continued from Page 14

Beyond physical needs

Ginger Deering, clinical manager for Baptist Memorial Hospital-Golden Triangle's Behavioral Health Outpatient, said caring for mothers' mental and emotional needs is equally important as their physical health.

"You have to be OK in order to make sure another little human being is OK," Deering said. "It's so important. I would say it's more important than probably someone that's just on their own because it's two beings involved instead of just one."

BMH-GT recently started providing perinatal counseling services, which addresses mental health concerns during pregnancy and after birth. Many mothers suffering mental health concerns, Deering said, mistakenly believe they're alone in that experience.

"It's so unspoken about," she said. "These

'These poor women are having so many issues and intrusive thoughts and (post-traumatic stress disorder from birth), and they just think they're bad moms. They don't realize this is actually really common.'

Ginger Deering, Baptist Memorial Hospital-Golden Triangle's Behavioral Health Outpatient

poor women are having so many issues and intrusive thoughts and (post-traumatic stress disorder from birth), and they just think they're bad moms. They don't realize this is actually really common."

Deering speaks with mothers dealing with everything from anxiety to PTSD to intrusive thoughts associated with obsessive compulsive disorder such as excessively worrying whether the baby is breathing.

Mothers can also speak with counselors

about managing their mental health before and during pregnancy, like what medications are safe while trying to conceive and during pregnancy.

Deering said talking openly about mental health can lessen the weight of those struggles.

"If you can speak on it and really get it out and look at it for what it is, it becomes less powerful and (less of a) burden on you," she said.

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Connected by Care



Braden Simmons/Dispatch Staff

Roger Felton, a delivery driver with Macon Septic Systems, lifts and loads a storm shelter Monday with his crane truck at the facility in Macon. Covering windows, tarping roofs and installing storm shelters are just a few of the ways locals can prepare their homes for storm season in the Golden Triangle, said Cindy Lawrence, Lowndes County Emergency Management Agency director.

Weathering the storm before it begins

How locals can tackle stormproofing their home

By **Braden Simmons**
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Following a turbulent weather season to kick off the year punctuated by below-freezing temperatures, golf ball-sized hail and strong winds gusts of

more than 60 mph, Golden Triangle residents may be looking for the best ways to mitigate future storm damage.

Cindy Lawrence, Lowndes County Emergency Management Agency director, said the best time to prepare for severe

weather is well before it happens rather than in the days leading up to severe storms or tornados.

"Now is the perfect time to start preparing your home and your property for severe weather because we are moving into that season where we're changing to another season," Lawrence

said. "We just started our spring, and we know that (historically) we have many tornados in the month of April."

Lawrence said having a generator and batteries to power important items on hand if power goes out during a storm is a good start, along with trimming

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Weatherproofing

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and tending to overgrown limbs on nearby trees so they're less likely to fly off during a storm.

"The one thing I'm seeing more than anything, is how trees are falling from maybe a neighbor's yard into another ... home," Lawrence said. "Those homes are basically completely destroyed. ... So that is the reason why I think the number one thing people need to start doing right now is trying to remove those trees or making sure the dead limbs have been removed from their trees."

Lawrence and Jack Vowell, owner of Vowell Insurance Services, agreed annually inspecting your home is a great way to identify which problem areas can be fixed on a home before they become a larger concern during a storm.

"The biggest thing is pride of ownership and just always checking everything on your house – all of your appliances, your water system, your electrical system – and getting things inspected periodically ... to make sure everything's still up to code," Vowell said. "... So if something does happen, it doesn't become worse than it could have been."

Vowell said taking preventative measures can ensure any damage that occurs during a storm is less likely to be deemed by an adjuster on a claim as an act of negligence, leaving the homeowner to foot the bill.

"You don't want to try to file a claim on negligence of your property," Vowell said. "(You don't want there to be a question of) is your roof leaking because it's just old, or is your roof leaking because the storm happened?"

Bradley Jones, an outside sales representative with Cash



Braden Simmons/Dispatch Staff

Roger Felton, a delivery driver with Macon Septic Systems, clips a chain into place on top of a storm shelter in preparation for a delivery Monday at the facility in Macon. Backyard storm shelters can provide a level of safety during extreme weather events like a tornado that a home may not, said Greg Cotton, general manager with Macon Septic Systems.

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Cindy Lawrence, Lowndes County Emergency Management Agency director

and Carry Building Supply, said purchasing caulk to fill in gaps in brick near windows can help to prevent potential leaks in a house.

Jones said while there are some up-front costs for those improvements homeowners have to fork over, they pay dividends in the long run.

When it comes to tornado season, Greg Cotton, general manager with Macon Septic

Systems, said above-ground storm shelters are a great addition for any homeowner wanting to ensure their safety.

Cotton said adding a storm shelter first requires a home owner to create either a 9-by-9-foot or 10-by-10-foot square of gravel or concrete for the structure to stand on. Then it's just a matter of the crew moving the shelter, which requires a crane truck.

The entire install process takes roughly 30 minutes once it's at the house, Cotton said, and once a storm shelter is up, it's not moving.

"They're tested for up to 250 mph winds, which is (the strength of) an F-5 tornado," Cotton said. "They're reinforced concrete with a steel door that opens inward in case debris were to pile up in front of the door."



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A new chapter: Finding home again in retirement communities

Themed events help seniors trade isolation for engagement

By **Braden Simmons**
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While some may think retirement communities are all card games and bingo nights, they would be sorely mistaken.

Depending on the night, you might just catch a talent show with retired performers hitting all the right notes to “I Got You Babe” by Sonny and Cher or dramatically reading an original work of poetry.

At least, those were some of the acts seen last week at Trinity Place Retirement Community’s talent show, Director of Marketing Rhonda Richardson said.

“(We found) out a lot about people,” Richardson said. “... Once you do that, then everybody else is going, ‘Oh, I like that (too).’”

Richardson said having these kinds of events are what help with bridging the transition someone makes when entering into a retirement community.

“I think especially at the ages that they come, most of them have lost a spouse, and so they’re coming because they’re lonely,” Richardson said. “And so retirement communities like this help them to get back engaged and help them have more social skills again.”

Those challenges were present for Elena Thompson when she finally decided to move into



Braden Simmons/Dispatch Staff

From left, Elena Thompson and Doris McClusky sit on a bench outside Thompson’s apartment Monday at Trinity Place Retirement Community in Columbus. Thompson after more than two years of discussion with her children finally made the leap to join a retirement community in September and to move out of her three bedroom home in New Hope.

‘I think especially at the ages that they come, most of them have lost a spouse, and so they’re coming because they’re lonely. And so retirement communities like this help them to get back engaged and help them have more social skills again.’

Rhonda Richardson, Trinity Place Retirement Community

Trinity in September.

Thompson said she was nervous about losing some of the independence she was accustomed to from living on her own in New Hope.

“My children decided that

I should not live alone, and I had to keep mulling that over,” Thompson said. “I just thought, ‘Well, I’m still maintaining and I’m still walking. I’m still able to cook.’ But things did get harder for me. ... They thought that I

should really consider moving to a retirement place. It was hard.”

After nearly seven months, Thompson said she feels far happier than when she was tending to her three-bedroom home.

Part of the reason for this new found joy, Thompson said, is from the fun events she enjoys with her new friends.

“It’s wonderful. I was so impressed with the dining room and the meals and the activities that they have here,” Thompson said. “I don’t see how anybody could get lonely.”

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Retirement

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Richardson and Kyme Thompson, the activities director for The Windsor at the Pointe Retirement Community, said each retirement community hosts monthly meetings with residents to put together a calendar that will land with community members.

"Activities in general, whether it be a talent show or whatever, you find out a lot about each other," Richardson said. "And then that's how they start blending, and how they start mixing and getting engaged."

At The Windsor, Thompson said her retirees always look forward to the retirement community's annual Valentine's Day fashion show and party.

Each February, staff roll out the red carpet for members to strut their stuff while in their best attire down the runway.

"They're waving and they're smiling and some of them are dancing with their hands," Thompson said. "... They do it all. Whatever is on their heart to do. ... And we love doing it too."

Thompson said for retirees in wheelchairs and walkers, they also go the extra mile by putting feathers, boas and beads to ensure they're catwalk and photo ready.

Leading up to the event, staff and residents also cast their ballots for a king and queen for the night who were crowned at the party.

"I remember the first year ... having one resident at the ballot station at the desk who made sure everybody voted for her," Thompson said.

For Thompson her goal is to make each event an experience that residents will remember because they let her know if it fell flat.



Braden Simmons/ Dispatch Staff

From left, Elena Thompson and Doris McClusky look at books in Thompson's apartment Monday at Trinity Place Retirement Community in Columbus. Local retirement communities aim to ease the transition for residents with daily activities and community involvement.

'They're waving and they're smiling and some of them are dancing with their hands. ... They do it all. Whatever is on their heart to do. ... And we love doing it too.'

Kyme Thompson, The Windsor at Pointe Retirement Community

"You want to make it something that they're going to really enjoy," Thompson said. "... You have got to try just about anything that you think they will like. ... Because, I'm telling you, if they don't like it, you will know it. If it is a hit, you will know it."



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