Successful 2020 Empty Plate Campaign: Thanks to Sponsors and Supporters

On October 7, 2020, we will celebrate the 17th Annual Empty Plate Campaign, Awards Presentation and a Special 50th Anniversary Video. A Campaign that has taken place in the midst of COVID-19 has shown the challenges, opportunities and needs that continue to exist in the Richmond Region.

This successful Campaign is made possible through the generosity of our sponsors, supporters and the 2020 Steering Committee, led by Mrs. Eva Hardy. We recognize and thank all of our sponsors, supporters and advisors. Joining Mrs. Hardy, Mr. G. Gilmer Minor III has been one of this year’s generous supporters, and we are most grateful.

The Phoebe and Frank Hall Award for Humanitarian Service to Older Virginians will be presented to Mrs. Lynne Seward, Retired CEO of A Grace Place Adult Services; Mrs. Marilyn Branch-Mitchell, Human Resources Director with Senior Connections; and Dr. Ellen Netting, retired professor with the School of Social Work at Virginia Commonwealth University.

These awards will be presented by Mrs. Hardy and Mrs. Nancy Nagle Bolio, spokesperson for the Hall Awards.

In 2023, Senior Connections will reach our 50th year of service. To commemorate this milestone, we are presenting a 50th Anniversary Video produced by Mr. Kevin Pridgen. Thanks to all who have made this video possible.

We have many new sponsors joining this year, and we are very grateful. With anticipated proceeds from this year’s Campaign, we will be able to fill more “empty plates” for deserving older adults and caregivers who often have no other sources of assistance. We will be able to assist them with meals, rides, home care, financial support and other critical needs. The generosity of our contributors continues to give us inspiration and hope for the future.

Therefore, as we prepare for this year’s Virtual Celebration, we extend special thanks to those who have already contributed to the Empty Plate Campaign. We also extend a special invitation to others who may wish to contribute to this important effort before the end of 2020. Your contributions will enable us to reach this year’s goal of $160,000 that is needed to fill the “empty plates” of older adults and caregivers in communities throughout the Richmond Region. Your contributions will also enable us to address COVID-19 related needs.

This year, we give special recognition to Ms. Thelma Brooks, one of the many volunteers who support Senior Connections in so many wonderful ways. Ms. Brooks made it possible for Senior Connections to receive a special contribution from Alfred Street Baptist Church as part of their spirit of giving ministry. We also extend special thanks to Mrs. Yinestra and Mr. Floyd Robinson (retired Senior Connections staff and past volunteer, respectively) for their ongoing and generous contributions to Annual Empty Plate Campaigns.

If you still wish to contribute, you may do so on our website at www.senior-connections-va.org, or send your contribution to Senior Connections, CAAA, 24 East Cary Street, Richmond, VA 23219. Thanks for helping us fill “empty plates” again this year and into the future!
Senior Connections is pleased to recognize three individuals for the 2020 Phoebe and Frank Hall Humanitarian Award for Service to Older Adults. On October 7, 2020, during the Empty Plate Campaign Virtual Celebration, the Phoebe and Frank Hall Humanitarian Award for Service to Older Adults was awarded to Mrs. Marilyn Branch-Mitchell, Dr. F. Ellen Netting, and Ms. Lynne Seward. We are celebrating individuals who may not receive a lot of recognition but whose contributions have made a positive impact on the lives of older adults, caregivers and their families.

Mrs. Marilyn Branch-Mitchell
As Human Resources Director, Mrs. Branch-Mitchell is a member of the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), is the Lead for the Senior Connections Walk to End Alzheimer’s Team, the United Way Campaign, serves on the AARP-Virginia Central Volunteer Leadership Team, and is Treasurer for the Regional Caucus on Aging (RCoA).

Mrs. Branch-Mitchell graduated from Westminster College at the University of Richmond with a bachelor’s degree in sociology. She has been an active alumna and has served on the Presidential Commission for University History and Identity. Mrs. Branch-Mitchell is currently serving on the University of Richmond Alumni Association Board and is their liaison to the University of Richmond Board of Trustees.

Mrs. Branch-Mitchell has a long history of volunteering in the community. She volunteered with several Parent-Teacher Associations, served as a troop committee member with the Boy Scouts of America, and was a troop leader and committee member with the Girl Scouts of the Commonwealth of Virginia. She is still a lifetime Girl Scout.

Mrs. Branch-Mitchell was also a member of the Virginia Association of Family and Community Education and has volunteered with the Chesterfield County Fair Association. She has been married to Gregory Mitchell since 1982, and they are the proud parents of Travis and Sarah.

Mrs. Branch-Mitchell’s Perspective About the Award, the Future and Senior Connections:
Senior Connections forward-thinking leaders, like Dr. Thelma Watson and Ms. Mary Payne, have kept the agency in the forefront of meeting the challenges faced by older adults in our community. I know we will continue to be flexible in respond-

ing to the changing needs of older adults. I have been impressed by the way Senior Connections has pivoted and adapted in order to continue services for older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic. We have successfully met this unique challenge and found creative ways to address the issues it has presented to our community and our employees.

Dr. F. Ellen Netting
Dr. Ellen Netting, PhD is professor emerita in social work and the former Samuel R. Wetzel Endowed Chair at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU).

Dr. Netting taught for 29 years, 19 years at VCU and 10 years at Arizona State University.

Her practice includes experience directing a county office on aging, leading a foster grandparent program, serving as the trainer for an area agency on aging that served 16 counties, and consulting with numerous local and state health and human service organizations. Dr. Netting received her bachelor’s degree from Duke University, her master’s in social work from the University of Tennessee, and her PhD from the University of Chicago.

Dr. Netting is a co-author of eight books and co-editor of four books. She has published more than 180 chapters in various publications and has served as a referee for articles published in professional journals.

Dr. Netting continues to collaborate on the textbook, Social Work Macro Practice, a leading textbook in the social work field, now in its sixth edition (2017). She received the VCU Distinguished Scholar Award in 1997, and received the Recent Contributions to Scholarship Award at the Council on Social Work Education’s Annual Program Meeting in 2005.

She is a fellow in the Gerontological Society of America, and provides community service and program evaluation expertise to the Greater Richmond Chapter of the Alzheimer’s Association, the Virginia State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program, and Senior Connections’ Foster Grandparent Program. Her scholarship has focused on health and human service delivery issues for frail elders, as well as nonprofit management and voluntarism, primarily in religiously affiliated agencies.

Dr. Netting’s Perspective About the Award, the Future and Senior Connections:
As I look back, I am so grateful to the strong women from Gate City, Virginia who gave me a foundation on which to build my life. My grandmother would say “we have to rise to the occasion” when it would have been more comfortable not to rise.

My aunt used to act like all she needed to do was to call me and I’d figure out what to do, when she must have known deep down inside that I didn’t have a clue about how to fix the problem or make things better. But she believed in me. And when someone believes in you, you must the courage to act like you know what to do and then start wherever you can.

That is why I am so honored to receive the Phoebe and Frank Hall Humanitarian Award because it means you believed in me, and there is no greater gift. To receive a humanitarian award is beyond all my expectations because it means you believed that I might have made some small difference in the lives of others. And isn’t that what it’s all about?

I am so grateful to Senior Connections for bestowing such an honor on me and for reminding me of how important it is for us to continue “rising to the occasion” in these uncertain times. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Whenever I think of quality of life, I always return to the importance of having meaningful, empathetic relationships. During this pandemic, in order to keep people safe, we have isolated ourselves from others. We have long known that social isolation can do harm. My vision of the future is finding new approaches to keeping people of all ages connected in ways that promote good health, provide comfort and enhance happiness.

It is a vision in which disparities are recognized and there are earnest efforts to address these injustices and inequities. I envision a future in which we find new ways to sustain meaningful relationships and in which we recognize that every person is needed — that no matter what age, their contributions matter.

Many years ago, I was assigned to an Area Agency on Aging as a student intern. I was immediately smitten with the idea of there being an aging network that traversed the entire country, that I would always know who to call if I needed to locate resources for an older client, relative or friend. No matter where I lived, I connected with the local aging network.

Over the last 30 years that I’ve lived in Virginia, if anyone asked me where to go for advice or help, I have always known that referring them to Senior Connections will give them a place to start in navigating the health and human service system. One of the many successes of Senior Connections stems from its dedicated leadership that has embedded a culture of inclusion, advocacy, service and outreach into the community.

Ms. Lynne Seward
Ms. Lynne Seward is a Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist (CTRS) with over 46 years of experience in human services and rehabilitation. 27 years of those years in top-level management. She served as Chief Executive Officer for A Grace Place Adult Care Center, formerly Adult Care Services, for more than 30 years. She is known for her energy, enthusiasm, focused advocacy, and for her commitment to the needs and rights of persons with disabilities.

Ms. Seward has experience in program development and supervision of therapeutic programs serving a variety of ages and disabilities, including pediatrics, geriatrics, psychiatry, acute care, oncology, physical rehabilitation and community care. She has served various populations including individuals with intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities, mental illness, chronic illness and dementia.

Ms. Seward’s Perspective About the Award, the Future and Senior Connections:
I had the privilege of knowing both Frank and Phoebe Hall. Both of them embodied true humility and extraordinary civic engagement. I met Frank through my advocacy work, and Phoebe and I served on the Alzheimer’s Board.

I clearly recall the day when I first visited Delegate Hall’s office. I was a young professional full of passion determined to advocate for services for adults with disabilities and age-related conditions. But I was green and, yes, a bit scared.

Then, I met Nancy Bolio, Frank’s chief of staff, who welcomed me and, like countless others, took me under her wing. She introduced me to Delegate Hall and he became a champion for adult day services and the individuals and caregivers who needed this care.

Frank made an enormous impact through significant legislation, but to me, what was more important was not what he did, but how he did it. He was truly a man of and for the people and he had a unique gift of being able to listen so attentively that you thought you were the only person in the room.

He was able to successfully negotiate compromises because he showed respect to everyone and was a man of the highest integrity. Everyone trusted and respected him.

I am deeply honored by this award given in Frank’s and Phoebe’s name, and
Contributions to Senior Connections’ Annual Empty Plate Campaign help fund programs that support older adults with meals, home and community services, emergency services, transportation and social engagement programs.

This year, COVID-19 created additional needs in our community, and funds raised through the Empty Plate Campaign this year will also be used to support older adults during the pandemic.

These programs are possible because of the generous contributions made by individuals, businesses and other community partners. We are grateful for every dollar we receive, and we thank everyone who has financially supported our programs. Since we are unable to thank our sponsors in person this year, we want to acknowledge their support in the Empty Plate Campaign edition of our Engage at Any Age Newsletter.

Thank You, Program Sponsors!

Alfred Street Baptist Church
Since 1903

Alfred Street Baptist Church is located in Alexandria, Virginia, and with a congregation size of over 10,000, the church has been a leader among churches and has made significant contributions in education, missions, children ministries and advancement of women.

In April 2020, Pastor Wesley announced Alfred Street’s Tithe the Tithe initiative to donate to organizations making a difference in the fight against COVID-19. Senior Connections was fortunate to receive a generous donation from the initiative and we are sincerely grateful for their support during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ms. Mary Devine and her family have generously contributed to the Empty Plate Campaign and provided other supports to assist older adults and caregivers for many years.

Ms. Devine, an attorney and former staff with the Virginia Division of Legislative Services, is a member of the Board of Directors for Senior Connections. As a community volunteer, Ms. Devine shares her expertise and interest in governance with Senior Connections and other human service organizations in the Richmond Region.

The Barrington Family Foundation is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization headquartered in Albany, New York and is devoted to helping meet unmet needs while filling gaps in services.

The Colonial Downs Group leads by example in supporting the communities in which we operate. Our aim is to meaningfully improve the quality of life in the communities where our team members live and work.

It is our goal to partner with community organizations to help meet their mission and improve quality of life in our community. In that spirit we support Senior Connections and salute their service. Thank you, Senior Connections, for empowering older adults and adults with disabilities to live with dignity and choice.

Dominion Energy, often referred to as Dominion, is a power and energy company headquartered in Richmond, Virginia. Dominion Energy has been a sponsor of the Empty Plate Campaign since the initia-
Senior Connections Empty Plate Campaign – Supporting Older Adults in our Community

Each year, Senior Connections celebrates the Empty Plate Campaign and recognizes community partners, leaders and friends who help enhance the quality of life for older adults, individuals with disabilities and caregivers.

The Empty Plate Campaign emphasizes contributions to fill “empty plates” for older adults in need. This year, COVID-19 has created an additional need, and contributions are needed now more than ever.

Contributions to the 2019 Empty Plate Campaign provided more than 700 older adults in need with:

- Meals (Friendship Cafés and Home Delivered Meals)
- Transportation for medical appointments
- Personal Care and Homemaker Services to help caregivers
- Critical Assistance to Seniors (help with rent, mortgage and utility payments)
- Minor Home Repairs
- Socialization, educational and health/wellness activities and volunteer support
- Volunteer Engagement
- Care Transitions Services (Hospital to Home)
- Community Guardian Program

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Awards

From page B-2

accept it on behalf of all the advocates who have come before me and who will do so in the future.

I envision a vibrant and diverse community where every individual can contribute, is respected and embraced for their experiences and their unique gifts regardless of their age, abilities, sexual orientation, creed, culture or race. I see an inclusive community of compassion and empathy where all strive for the ideals of justice, equality, caring and a bit of fun. And most importantly, a community that works hard to challenge itself whenever it fails and, as John Lewis said, to cause “Good Trouble” when it is needed.

Congratulations on 50 years of service! This agency has accomplished so many milestones throughout these years and continues to grow and expand as the needs of older adults and those with disabilities grow as well.

I have enjoyed working with so many of the staff that have a firm commitment to this population and to the greater Richmond area. I particularly value their extraordinary dedication to caregivers and the ongoing support for adult day services.

None of the programs would be possible, however, without the strong and exemplary leadership of Executive Director Dr. Thelma Bland Watson. She models servant leadership that focuses on service and empowerment of others. Through her guidance, Senior Connections has grown into a major driver of service delivery and system change. Dr. Watson has developed multiple partnerships within the community, including government and the corporate sector, that are propelling the agency to meet the future head on.

Sponsors

From page B-3

tive’s inception in 2003.

Dominion Energy supports older adults through many programs and services, including Energy Share, outreach at community events, and Dominion’s extensive energy-related resources.

Ms. Vera Thoms, a member of the Senior Connections Board of Directors, states, “Dominion values older adults and their families. Older adults serve as role models for younger generations. Dominion Energy is a proud sponsor of the Annual Empty Plate Campaign. We are pleased to help with this important effort.”

Genworth

With origins that date back to 1871, Genworth Financial, Inc. is a Fortune 500 Company headquartered in Richmond, VA. Genworth is “committed to helping families achieve the dream of home ownership.”

Genworth has long supported the Empty Plate Campaign, as well as other initiatives established to assist older adults and their caregivers. Their support of the Age Wave Coalition (now the Longevity Project), and of other services addressing other needs such as housing, transportation, home care and caregiver needs, has benefited many older adults and their families in our community.

Genworth is an advocate for programs related to long-term care planning, retirement and overall wellbeing. Genworth also assists Senior Connections with capacity building and board governance through Mr. Debrajya (Deb) Mitra with Genworth, who is a member of Senior Connections Board of Directors.

Mr. and Mrs. G. Gil Minor, III

Mr. and Mrs. Minor have been ardent and dedicated supporters of the Empty Plate Campaign, and they attended past luncheons to mingle with other guests and supporters.

Mr. Minor, a past keynote speaker for the Empty Plate Luncheon, encourages the Richmond Community to continue to help older adults and caregivers in need of critical services such as meals, rides, home care and social connections.

Mr. and Mrs. Minor are generous supporters and have ensured the success of the Campaign for the past five years. During this time, they have contributed and provided significant encouragement.

Mr. Minor is the retired chairman and chief executive officer of Owens & Minor as well as Chairman Emeritus. Mr. Minor and Mrs. Charlotte Minor are dedicated volunteers and committed to the betterment of the Richmond community and beyond. In retirement, Mr. Minor formed Minor and Major, LLC, a company dedicated to coaching and mentoring.

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Dr. Barbara B. Chapman
In Honor of Mrs. Geneva A. Redd
Ms. Ellen Gersten
In Memory of Saltanat Jahromi
Sheryl L. Herndon, Esquire
In Honor of Pamela B. Williams
Ms. Juanita B. Leatheryberry
In Honor of Warren and Gretchen Brown
Mr. Ralph Lyons
In Memory of Mrs. Alice Lyons
Ms. Lory L. Phillippo
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