

Mentors Make Transition Easier for New Villa Gardens Residents

When new resident Lyssa Axen moved to Villa Gardens in August 2021, she did not know what to expect. She was living a rich life and wanted to continue to pursue her passions and explore new ones. She knew Villa Gardens was the place to do that - a community filled with opportunities, new friendships, good food and fun! However, as a newcomer Lyssa knew there was much to learn and more to enjoy.



Olive, right, shows Lisa around Villa Gardens.

"I was looking forward to a new chapter in my life but also to continue doing what I loved and Villa made it so easy," Lyssa said.

Moving from one home to another at any point in life has the potential to be stressful. But Villa Gardens prides itself in creating a warm and welcoming environment helping its new residents settle in as seamlessly as possible.

The Villa Gardens Mentor Committee is co-chaired by Olive Harkness, a retired administrative assistant who describes herself as a "talker," the perfect combination to help any new resident feel comfortable right away. "I was the youngest of seven children so I always had to speak up if I wanted to be heard," Olive said with a laugh. "There is no need to be shy around me."

Olive knows the feeling of being new at a community that has so much to offer, having moved to Villa Gardens five years ago from the Philadelphia area. When she arrived, she was soon greeted by a mentor who not only showed her the ins and outs of Villa life, but made her feel special.

"That experience was so valuable to me," Olive said. "Because of my mentor, I made wonderful friends here who I feel I have known for a lifetime. When I became a mentor, I not only wanted new residents to feel welcome but also exhilarated and celebratory about their move to Villa Gardens as I did."

Villa Garden's mentors are current residents who volunteer to become supportive contacts to new arrivals. They show new residents around, accompany them to dinner and activities, and introduce them to others. "In other words, like the committee did for me, we show them the ropes and help

them experience how wonderful it is to live here," Olive said.

Olive tries to match residents with similar interests or personalities to ensure lasting connections. She and her team also supply newcomers with an information welcome packet that includes campus map, phone directories, calendars and more.

"We don't just hand them these things with no explanation, we go over everything in detail," Olive said. "If our mentee has any questions, he or she can call us at any time. All of our mentors enjoy their work. We expect them to call and we are anxious to help."