

Brian Brehm Health, Science and Environmental Writing W15

'Miracle workers': Rehab center has been getting people back on their feet for 30 years

By Brian Brehm

The Winchester Star

WINCHESTER — Cathy Kelly wouldn't be who she is today had it not been for [Winchester Rehabilitation Center](#).

On Sept. 11, the Winchester resident suffered a stroke that damaged the right side of her brain.

"I got up in the morning to go to the bathroom and the left side of my body was paralyzed," Kelly said last week in a telephone interview.

Four days later, the 67-year-old was transferred from [Winchester Medical Center](#) to Winchester Rehabilitation Center, both of which are operated by [Valley Health](#).

Kelly was admitted to one of the rehab facility's 30 patient beds and underwent several hours worth of intense physical and speech therapy every morning and afternoon.

"When you're telling somebody like me that never exercised or went to a gym that I'm going to have to work out that many hours a day, it's very difficult," she said. "But the people there are wonderful. They are happy, they have great senses of humor and they keep you going. You don't even realize you're working out."

When Kelly left Winchester Rehabilitation Center on Oct. 11, exactly one month after the stroke had paralyzed her left side and significantly slurred her speech, "I was talking, walking with a walker, dressing myself, using my left arm and carrying a debt of appreciation I will never be able to repay."

On Tuesday, the members of Kelly's therapy team — physical therapist Courtney Sansone, occupational therapist Heba Frye and speech pathologist Marysia Adler — sat down with therapy team leader Jennifer Hartstein and three Winchester Rehabilitation Center administrators to talk about how the facility at 333 W. Cork St., which is celebrating its 30th year of service, gets people with neurological and mobility hindrances back on their feet in a relatively short period of time.

"We are hospital-level rehab, which is ... the most aggressive, most comprehensive rehab program," said Jennifer Carter, who has been medical director of the rehabilitation center since 2015.

Carter said she became interested in helping people overcome neurological and orthopedic issues when she was in college and her 57-year-old father suffered a stroke.

"I witnessed the crucial impact of a rehab team both on the patient and the family," she said. "Now, every patient I treat, I see my father and try to find out what is meaningful to them and

what their individualized goals may be. I aim to treat my patients with the same compassion and quality of care I wanted for my dad."

Jessica Watson, director of rehabilitation services for Valley Health, said about 400 patients per year are admitted into the center's in-patient treatment programs. Hundreds more people utilize its outpatient services, which include pool therapy for patients with physical challenges, speech therapy for children with autism, physical therapy for individuals who recently underwent significant medical procedures and more.

David Booth, director of outpatient therapy services at Winchester Rehabilitation Center, came to work at the facility seven months after it opened in 1993. In that time, he said he has seen insurance companies reduce their willingness to pay for long-term rehabilitation, which has put healthcare providers in a position where they have to work faster than ever to help patients improve.

Insurance providers today also push to have patients discharged from hospitals as quickly as possible, so when people are transferred to Winchester Rehabilitation Center, Booth said, they have not always had sufficient time to fully recover and are often in worse physical condition than the patients who came to the facility in the early 1990s, when insurers were more amenable to longer in-patient stays.

Hartstein agreed.

"They're keeping them in acute care hospitals for a very short time," she said. "As soon as they are even remotely medically stable enough, it's a push to get them to the next destination, whether it be a rehab like us or a skilled nursing facility."

When patients come to Winchester Rehabilitation Center, Hartstein said, "They get more intense therapy with the idea of getting them home sooner ... with a goal of being independent or at a level where their family can safely help them."

Every patient sets his or her own recovery goal, such as returning to work, driving a car or using the bathroom independently. Winchester Rehabilitation Center works toward achieving that goal, which sometimes requires staff to be creative. For example, an employee's dog, Paprika, was recently brought in to work with a client who wanted to be able to walk his own dog once he got home.

"We simulate a lot of environments to re-create a situation they might have at home," Hartstein said. "But the therapy doesn't stop here. They go home and either do home health therapy or continue with outpatient therapy."

Families are key to the recovery process, Carter said, so the center also trains relatives in the best ways to care for their loved ones.

"That aspect sets us aside from other levels of rehab," she said.

The therapists at Winchester Rehabilitation Center help their clients stay focused through the difficult, sometimes painful, recovery process by using humor, praise, goal setting and never-ending encouragement.

"When you're able to bring entertainment and make work fun," Carter said, "it's easier to push forward and work harder and do more. That's what our therapists do."

Kelly said her therapy team's kindness and compassion is what got her through the most difficult ordeal of her life, but Frye said Kelly is selling herself short.

"She's giving us all the credit but she did all the work," Frye said.

"We always said Cathy was our best student ... but we had to give her her confidence back," Sansone added. "She didn't believe in herself the way we believed in her."

Thanks to the encouragement and support of her therapy team, Kelly's confidence soared and she worked as hard as humanly possible to bounce back from a debilitating stroke.

"She was very motivated to improve," Adler added. "She came along so quickly and so beautifully."

Kelly said the employees at Winchester Rehabilitation Center are "miracle workers," and she considers herself a highly satisfied customer.

"They are doing wonders for our community," she said. "It's amazing."

To learn more about Winchester Rehabilitation Center, visit <https://bit.ly/3uv9po8>.

Music therapy program something worth singing about

By Brian Brehm

The Winchester Star

WINCHESTER — A decade after becoming the first continuing care retirement community in the country to hire a full-time music therapist, the residents of [Shenandoah Valley Westminster-Canterbury](#) still have a song in their hearts.

Abigail "Abby" D'Arcangelis, a native of Maine, joined the Westminster-Canterbury staff in September 2012 and has been working miracles with music ever since.

Music therapy is used to address a range of physical and cognitive conditions, everything from learning to walk and speak again after a stroke to triggering memories and awareness in people suffering from dementia.

Three residents of the retirement community in Winchester — Charlotte Collins, Bob Sherwood and Margaret "Peggy" Denison — understood the value of music therapy and, in 2012, pushed the facility to hire a full-time practitioner.

Up until then, the retirement community had integrated music therapy into its community activities, but the service was only offered as time allowed by an activities director who was also juggling other duties.

Collins, Sherwood and Denison wanted a trained music therapist who could work with residents every day, not just for a few hours here and there. Denison, who passed away in 2019, even offered some of her own money to help fund a full-time therapy program.

"Music therapy in retirement communities wasn't very understood at that time," Sherwood said. "[Administrators] thought it was entertainment."

Collins had extensive knowledge of music therapy. She was dean of [Shenandoah Conservatory](#) at Winchester's [Shenandoah University](#) from 1972 to 2006, where she helped develop several music therapy offerings.

"I also was involved with the national agency that accredited music therapy programs so I knew what the requirements were," Collins said. "We started there as a basis for what we were looking for."

After convincing Shenandoah Valley Westminster-Canterbury administrators to launch a full-time music therapy program, Collins, Sherwood and Denison ran a national "help wanted" ad through the [American Music Therapy Association](#), then interviewed six candidates on the telephone. They asked some of them to come in for face-to-face interviews, the first of whom was D'Arcangelis.

"And then we quit," Collins said, because D'Arcangelis was so perfect for the job, there was no need to interview anyone else.

The music therapy program established at Shenandoah Valley Westminster-Canterbury in September 2012 is now benefiting people far beyond Winchester, Sherwood said. That's because the program is part of a national intern initiative that has trained aspiring music therapists who are now working in continuing care retirement communities across the country.

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D'Arcangelis is a professional music therapist credentialed by the [Certified Board for Music Therapists](#), [The Center for Music Therapy in End of Life Care](#), [The Academy of Neurologic Music Therapy](#) and the [National Council of Certified Dementia Practitioners](#). She is also an accomplished guitarist, pianist and vocalist.

Music therapy, D'Arcangelis said, "is a clinical profession, much like physical therapy, speech therapy and mental health counseling, wherein we're using music as a tool to address a non-musical goal. I think what's unique about it is that it can address who a person is, so it's a way to address a goal an individual might have but it's also a way to highlight someone's abilities and their strengths as opposed to their impairments or disabilities."

Most people enjoy listening to, playing or singing along with music, so D'Arcangelis' therapy sessions allow them to relax and have fun without focusing on the fact they are working to overcome physical, speech and cognitive problems.

"Oftentimes, people won't even think or realize we're doing therapy because we're enjoying the music," she said. "Imaging of the brain shows that when you're listening to music, your entire brain is being utilized. ... That's why if you have a speech section that's damaged, other parts of the brain take over because the whole brain is being utilized."

D'Arcangelis caters her therapy sessions to each individual, which includes playing their favorite style of music. Whereas one person may like American standards, another may prefer hymns, pop songs or folk music.

"The job of a music therapist is to utilize whatever music the person they're working with prefers," she said. "You have to be able to reproduce all genres from all decades."

A favorite song can trigger someone to have very specific memories of an earlier time, such as where they were and what was happening when they first heard the tune. That's one reason why music therapy is beneficial to people suffering from dementia and similar cognitive conditions.

"They're losing their short-term memory, they're losing the ability to make choices and recognize their loved ones," D'Arcangelis said. "Play that song that's special to them and they immediately recall the lyrics, the emotions, the time, the place, the people."

If you want to see for yourself how D'Arcangelis works her musical magic, check out a video on YouTube called "[10 Years of MT and SVWC](#)" that was produced in October by Shenandoah Valley Westminster-Canterbury to celebrate her 10th anniversary at the retirement community.

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Shenandoah Valley Westminster-Canterbury resident Diane Sinclair said her husband, Dr. Terry Sinclair, a physician who was known in the community for founding Winchester's Free Medical Clinic (now the [Sinclair Health Clinic](#)), had another side to him that most people didn't know about: He was a talented pianist who, for most of his life, owned and treasured a baby grand piano.

"Music was in his heart and soul," Diane Sinclair said of her husband, who passed away on Nov. 26, 2021.

In 2015, a brain bleed robbed Sinclair of the use of his left hand. He was devastated because he didn't want to play the piano with just one hand, meaning he may never play again.

Then he met D'Arcangelis.

"She said, 'You play this and I'll play the left hand,'" Diane Sinclair said. "That hour a week was the highlight of his week. ... The minute she walked in, it was sunshine."

Instead of working around Sinclair's disability, D'Arcangelis focused on his abilities and worked to improve them.

Sinclair became so comfortable and accomplished at playing piano with a partner, he asked D'Arcangelis if they could perform for other people.

"They would play and get people to sing," Diane Sinclair said, smiling as she remembered the joy it brought her husband of 55 years. "My eyes were opened to a profession that I had no idea how deep it was."

You can see and hear Sinclair playing "In the Garden" on piano about one hour and nine minutes into the YouTube video at <https://bit.ly/3uG81PC>.

Kitty Zuckerman, communications and foundation coordinator at Shenandoah Valley Westminister-Canterbury, said her mother, Virginia "Jenny" Zuckerman, also flourished with D'Arcangelis' musical assistance.

"I didn't understand what Abby did, quite frankly, and wasn't aware how much music therapy could help somebody who had had a stroke," she said.

After suffering the stroke, Jenny Zuckerman required direct medical care for a year until she was able to return to the assisted-living section of Shenandoah Valley Westminister-Canterbury, where she resided with her husband, former Winchester mayor Charles M. "Charlie" Zuckerman. Speech and physical therapy helped her regain a degree of independence, and music therapy furthered her speech and cognitive improvements.

"Abby was able to tap into her love of music," Kitty Zuckerman said. "She had her singing and learning to form her mouth in a way to get the right words out. It was amazing to witness."

You can see D'Arcangelis working with Jenny Zuckerman at the 30-minute mark in the YouTube video.

"It was phenomenal and maybe made me cry a little bit," Kitty Zuckerman said about the video footage.

Jenny Zuckerman passed away on Oct. 10, 2020. Charlie Zuckerman followed two months later, on Dec. 25, 2020.

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For more than a year starting in March 2020, Shenandoah Valley Westminister-Canterbury was on lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Residents couldn't leave the property — some couldn't even leave their rooms or apartments — and visitors were forbidden from campus in an effort to keep the coronavirus at bay.

"This community was under incredible stress," Sherwood said. "There were two people who held the place together: Abby and our art instructor (Gale Bowman-Harlow). ... Abby became

our de facto chaplain during that period. She was not only applying the clinical techniques of music therapy, she was lifting the spirit of this place and that was a big, big plus."

Terry Sinclair was one of many beneficiaries of D'Arcangelis' kindness and compassion during COVID-19. He was one the residents who couldn't leave his apartment, which meant he couldn't play the piano in one of the common areas at Shenandoah Valley Westminister-Canterbury. D'Arcangelis arranged to have a keyboard delivered to his dwelling.

"It must be heartwarming to be involved with something that brings such joy to people," Diane Sinclair said to D'Arcangelis.

"She has touched so many lives," Kitty Zuckerman added. "I pray she stays here for a long time because it's in her heart and we're so fortunate to have her."

'The greatest resource I've ever had': Widower praises Blue Ridge Hospice services provided to him and his dying wife

**By Brian Brehm
The Winchester Star**

WINCHESTER — Death is an inevitable part of life, but there are ways to ease the darkest of times.

Just ask Mark Bowman of Berryville, who lost his wife of 43 years on Nov. 9, 2021, but remains eternally grateful to [Blue Ridge Hospice](#) of Winchester for bringing joy and comfort to her during the final 15 months of her life.

On Monday, Mark visited the nonprofit's offices at 333 W. Cork St. to share his gratitude.

He said his wife, June Bowman, was a joy, her smile infectious and her outlook always bright. When he would get consumed by work and responsibilities, she uplifted him with love. When he got angry or frustrated, she reminded him to focus on the positive and let the negative slip away.

"She was always finding the best in people," Mark said on Monday. "She was so beautiful, I didn't deserve to be beside her."

By the time Mark and June were in their 50s, they had raised three children — Cathy, Gregory and Mark Jr. — and were starting to look forward to retirement. Fate had other plans, though, and in 2008, when June was just 58, she started having memory issues.

"It got worse and worse," Mark said. "From 2008 to 2016, we didn't have an exact cause of what it was. Then we got the diagnosis."

Mark was devastated to learn his wife had Alzheimer's disease but his commitment to her never wavered. In 2019, when June reached the point where she needed full-time care, he retired early at the age of 66.

Mark always made sure June got the medical services she needed, but when the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020, he said, "I couldn't get help. We were stuck in the house, just her and me."

June's disease robbed her of the ability to know she was sick so, as her condition declined, she started resisting Mark's assistance.

"The fact that I couldn't fix this was killing me," he said.

In 2020, Mark hired private caretakers to come into his home and help. One of them told him that June, who was by now bedridden, would probably qualify for hospice services even though she was not in imminent danger of dying.

"I thought hospice was only for somebody who had six months to live," Mark said. "She certainly wasn't in that window."

Mark followed the caregiver's advice anyway and called Blue Ridge Hospice.

The organization took June into its care on Aug. 26, 2020. A team of service providers paid regular visits to her house and tended to her every physical, emotional and spiritual need, making it possible for June to remain in the home she loved and for Mark to have the strength he needed as his wife continued to deteriorate. Hospice nurses and officials even brought in supplies and medications because they knew how hard it was for Mark to leave the house, especially during the pandemic.

"They took care of her, and they taught me how to take care of her better," he said.

"Twenty-four/seven care. One time I called in the middle of the night and somebody was there within an hour. ... You're not going to get that anywhere."

Leigh Jenks, a music therapist with Blue Ridge Hospice, would frequently stop by to perform some of June's favorite songs — particularly those by Tom Jones, George Jones and Elvis Presley — in an attempt to make her smile, interact and remember.

"She was so motivated by the music that that would often happen," Leigh said, noting that Mark and the couple's daughter, Cathy Lane of Berryville, would often cozy up with June and let the music lift their spirits as well.

Kayla Dyke, a certified nursing assistant with Blue Ridge Hospice, would often entertain June by dancing with Mark while Leigh played music. Kayla said she felt inspired by "the dedication and love that Mark had for June," and that the Bowmans "will truly leave an imprint on my heart forever."

June's quality of life improved thanks to the hospice services, but nothing could stop her physical and mental decline. Mark occasionally became overwhelmed with sadness while watching his wife slip away, but Blue Ridge Hospice — especially social worker Cindy Buxton and house Chaplain Ken Patrick — went beyond the call of duty to help him during his darkest hours.

"Between the two of them, they pulled me out of the rabbit hole more than once," Mark said.

At one point, Mark said he was so low that he fell to his knees and told Ken he didn't know how much more he could bear.

"He said, 'You've got to treat it like a tidal wave,'" Mark said. "'You cannot be in front of the tidal wave because it will overwhelm you every time. You have to be behind the tidal wave so you can see what's happening in front of you and react.' It was a big turning point for me."

Mark realized he had to stop worrying about what was ahead and instead focus on being present in the moment. He even bought a wall clock that replaced all the numbers on its face with the word "Now."

"I still live by that clock," he said.

Today, when Mark looks back on the many ways Blue Ridge Hospice helped him and his wife, he said the organization "was the greatest resource I've ever had in my life."

Jennifer Martin, executive director of Blue Ridge Hospice, said Mark and June's story is an excellent demonstration of why people should get hospice involved with their dying loved ones as soon as possible rather than waiting until death is imminent.

"It really gives us an opportunity to make such a powerful difference in their lives," Jennifer said, noting that only 3% of patients are referred for hospice services more than six months before passing away while 45% are enrolled when death is less than a week away.

Many of the services provided by Blue Ridge Hospice, including the music therapy that helped June and the bereavement counseling that helped Mark, are unique to the Winchester-based organization and not funded by state or federal dollars. Dawn Draayer, the nonprofit's director of philanthropy, said those offerings are only possible thanks to private financial donations to the nonprofit.

Blue Ridge Hospice is currently conducting its end-of-year fundraising campaign and is sharing Mark and June's story so donors have tangible examples of how their money is being put to use.

"This is really important support that can fund all of these programs we're talking about," Dawn said. "The time is now to make your gift. It will honor Mr. Bowman's commitment to us."

Mark said he recently told a woman in his Alzheimer's support group about how Blue Ridge Hospice gave compassionate support to him and his wife during the darkest 15 months of their lives.

"She told her family," Mark said, "and they're all making donations instead of sharing gifts among themselves."

To make a donation to Blue Ridge Hospice, visit its website at brhospice.org.