

# MUSIC TO LIVE BY

By Christy Brudin



The highly trained music therapy team at Kensington Park is dedicated to using music to help residents achieve their potential through one-on-one and group activities. (Pictured from left to right are: Rachelle Splechter, MT-BC; Khyla Anderson, MT-BC; Melissa Pate, MT-BC; and Jessica Power, MA, MT-BC).

**M**usic motivates. Music soothes. Music cures. At Kensington Park Senior Living, music is a central part of everyday life—and it is making life better for residents every day.

Kensington Park Senior Living is an independent living, assisted living and memory care community in Montgomery County, MD. The community offers a full continuum of care, allowing residents the opportunity to age in place with grace and dignity. Located on eight acres, the community offers a park-like setting and boasts mature trees, colorful gardens and plenty of walking paths. The community is also just minutes from the quaint town of Kensington, MD.

Several years ago, Kensington Park began a music therapy program, and the results have been remarkable. The community has an in-house music therapy team, including four dedicated

therapists. These highly trained staff members are committed to using music to help residents achieve their potential through one-on-one and group activities.

“Our interventions are based on detailed resident assessments, so we learn about the resident’s functioning and their musical preferences,” noted Director of Assisted Living and Creative Arts Therapies Jessica Power. “We look at not just their needs, but also what they are passionate about. We encourage our residents to be and feel the best they can!”

Jessica continued, “Our ultimate goal is increasing life enjoyment. Whether it is improving speech or elevating mood, music can help in so many ways. Most importantly, music serves as a way for residents to connect with their peers and their families.”

When Lois Marley first moved to Kensington Park, she was quiet and withdrawn. When her family mentioned

her love of music, Kensington Park arranged for her to have music therapy. Now, she is affectionately known as the “Resident Party Starter.”

A native Washingtonian, Lois will turn 91 in July 2019. While working as the Director of Personnel at Johns Hopkins, a young Lois met her future husband, Ed.

Lois and Ed enjoyed a short courtship that led to a long marriage. The couple had five children and settled in Olney, Maryland. Lois was an active member of their local Catholic church and loved singing in the choir for many years.

The Marleys owned a vacation home in Lewes, Delaware, for decades. After Ed retired, the couple moved there full time. When Ed passed away from Parkinson’s disease, Lois began to have problems living alone and being so far from her children.

“We tried in-home care, but she didn’t like that,” recalled Patty Marley Cunningham, Lois’s daughter. “We



Music groups, like the men's singing group pictured here at Kensington Park, help residents connect with their peers while enjoying some great music. (Pictured from left to right are: Paul Marks; Frank Michels; Rachelle Splechter, MT-BC; Bob Vaughan; Eugene O'Sullivan; Ferdinand Sasse; and Richard Rice).

moved her into a facility near by, but it wasn't a good fit. I could see her getting depressed, and she was losing weight."

When the family finally found Kensington Park, they felt relieved. "I immediately thought this was the place we should have been to begin with," Patty said. "And since we made the move here, everything has been wonderful!"

One of the reasons that Lois has transitioned to Kensington Park so smoothly is music therapy. The staff recommended therapy for her, and she also joined the resident choir.

"The music programs have made a world of difference for my mom," said Patty. "At Christmas, she wanted to sing during cocktail hour, and she was so enthusiastic about it and enjoyed it so much."

Both Lois's mood and her health have markedly improved. She has gained more than 20 (much-needed) pounds, and she is more engaged. "She's so happy, and we're so happy. I just wish I had known about Kensington Park earlier," concluded Patty.

Lois's dramatic transformation is one of many the staff at Kensington Park has seen with their music program participants. "We really do see people just blossom," said Jessica. "We have residents go from very minimal interaction to being verbal and engaged."



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— Jessica Power, Director of Assisted Living and Creative Arts Therapies at Kensington Park Senior Living

That is exactly what Marie Michels experienced. Marie suffers from Alzheimer's disease, and she had struggled to hold conversations or connect with others. Since starting music therapy, Marie has achieved improvements in both language and

agility. When singing along with the music, she can remember every word of a song. While walking with music playing, she is able to go further.

"It can be hard to sit and talk with Marie now," said her husband of 62 years, Frank. "But if I start singing to her, she will sing with me. That is a good part of my day."

Originally from New York City, Frank and Marie spent much of their married life in Connecticut. They have six children and eight grandchildren.

A chemical engineer, Frank worked for several companies throughout his career. He was serving as an executive when one of the companies was taken over in 1981, and he decided to retire. Marie was a stay-at-home mother to the couple's six children.

The Michels were still living in Connecticut when Frank started to experience hip problems and Marie was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. They decided that it was time to move, but they were torn over whether to remain in

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## The arts offer seniors many benefits beyond pleasure and enrichment



Whether a composition for the eyes, a melody for the ears, a two-step for the feet, or textures for the fingertips, the arts are good for seniors. Creative experiences and activities are not only joyful but are also therapeutic. They encourage social interaction, autonomy and a sense of purpose. They provide alternative ways of expression, reinforcement of problem-solving skills and a boost in self-esteem. They keep the mind engaged, the hands or feet moving and the senses stimulated. They can even ignite a forgotten but meaningful passion. All of these promote healing, which contributes positively to well-being of the mind, body and soul.

**Call or visit a Kensington Senior Living community in the metro DC area and explore their arts programs, which build connection in imaginative ways.**



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**The Kensington Falls Church • (703) 992-9868 • 700 West Broad Street, Falls Church, VA**  
**[www.TheKensingtonFallsChurch.com](http://www.TheKensingtonFallsChurch.com) • Assisted Living & Memory Care**

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## Music to Live By ...

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Connecticut or move to the D.C. region to be near three of their children.

“We looked at fourteen different places before we decided on this one,” Frank said. “Ultimately, we wanted to be closer to our children. And I wanted to move with Marie because after sixty

years of marriage, you don’t want to leave. We take care of each other and being here together has worked out beautifully for us.”

Frank, who participates in the men’s singing group at Kensington Park, explained that music is a big part of every day life at the community. “There is always music here. Music is universal, and it is incredible what it

does for the people here.”

From intensive music therapy programs to singing groups and special events, the residents at Kensington Park have many options for adding music to their days. And they are a testament to the healing and inspiring powers of music. They are making music, making friends, making memories and making the most of every day.

## A Beautiful Creation

Bright yellow flowers take shape on vibrant blue backdrops. The artists are focused—heads bowed, eyes alert. But this isn’t a master artist workshop, or even a high school classroom. It is the Memory Café at Famille Café.

A Memory Café is a gathering of individuals with memory loss along with their caregivers, friends or family in a safe, supportive and engaging environment. Famille is a casual cafe where everyone is welcome. Kensington Falls Church residents, family members, friends, and the broader community of Falls Church are invited to meet, mingle, sip and dine on culinary creations by local chef Irving Sosa.

The Kensington Falls Church team is partnering with local organizations to bring senior-specific, arts-inspired programming to Famille on a monthly basis. The Memory Café, a partnership of The Kensington Falls Church, Famille, Falls Church Arts

and Insight Memory Care Center, is one of these offerings, and it is open to the public.

Participants in the Memory Café include residents of The Kensington Falls Church and the larger community. Some of the participants have been artists their entire life. Others are exploring the medium for the first time. Some are experiencing memory loss, and some are caregivers providing support to a loved one. They are all finding encouragement and friendship.

“He’s an artist. He always has been,” said Marie-France Smith of her husband, Ed. “Our house is decorated with his paintings, and this is a great way for him to keep doing what he enjoys.” The couple has been coming to the Memory Cafés at Famille for nearly a year now, and they really appreciate the fun and stimulating atmosphere.

For Kensington resident Nancy Rizzo and her sister, Grace Risetto, the Memory Café is a great way to



Kensington Falls Church resident Nancy Rizzo focuses on her work during the Memory Café. Participants in the Memory Café include residents of The Kensington Falls Church and the larger community.

connect with each other. “I live right next door in an apartment, and I love coming here for this. It’s just wonderful that they have these programs, and Nancy really enjoys it,” said Grace.

“It’s just so incredible to have something like this in the community,” added Emily Furmage. Emily lives in the neighborhood surrounding The Kensington Falls Church with her husband, Hugh, who has Parkinson’s disease. “This is an important social outlet, and it’s fun. The Kensington Falls Church really is a wonderful place. My husband has taken therapy here too, and they offer so much for their residents and the community.”

As the participants put away their brushes and admire their creations, one thing is abundantly clear: they have crossed the barriers sometimes created by age and illness and made connections today. Together, they have created something beautiful.



During a recent Memory Café event at Famille Café, participants enjoyed an enriching art project and great company.