Making and selling one-of-a-kind pieces

Charles Todd’s woodworking led him to open a shop where he sells his own work, and pieces by other craftspeople and artists in ceramic, wood and fiber arts, among others.

By Constance Garcia-Barrio

The stunning desk that could have come from Downton Abbey charmed me. I nearly swooned at the sight of a red maple dining table, spare and magnificent. The vast workroom’s earthy scent of oak, cherry, pine, sycamore and mahogany, was more intoxicating than any Parisian perfume could be.

One enters ‘Tis a Gift, 7054 Germantown Ave., at the risk of falling head over heels for the handcrafted art of woodworkers, printmakers, ceramists and other artists.

Charles Todd, 67, has dedicated a lifetime to shaping wood into beautiful, custom-built furniture and inlaid marquetry panels that decorate the furniture, or stand alone, as wall art. His Mount Airy shop and gallery features both his work and that of other local artists.

“I’ve always liked to make things,” said Todd, who was raised on a farm in southern Illinois. “My dad always had a project on Saturdays. We repaired roads and built fences. Most farmers are pretty good carpenters. You can’t call in someone every time something breaks.”

Todd met his wife of 46 years at Washington University in St. Louis. The family moved to Philadelphia so that his wife could teach history at the University of Pennsylvania.

Among those whose work is displayed in ‘Tis a Gift’s gallery is wood carver Kathran Siegel, 70, whose work has been exhibited at the Woodmere Art Museum and the Smithsonian’s Renwick Gallery.

Celebrate Arts & Aging

Exhibits of senior art, receptions, discounts

By Marcia Z. Siegal

Philadelphia Corporation for Aging (PCA) presents a visual feast this month with five displays of senior artwork on exhibit for the 14th annual “Celebrate Arts and Aging.” Showcasing older adults’ talent and creativity, the works span a range of media – paintings, drawings, ceramics, jewelry, fabric art, mixed media and photography. Participants run the gamut too, from those new to art to longtime amateur and professional artists.
**Health Brief**

**Good habits and regular checkups can still protect your skin — and your life**

As the sunny days of summer come our way, and thoughts turn to beaches, boating, bike rides and other outdoor pursuits, be sure your plans include using sunscreen and taking other preventive measures to protect your skin.

According to the Skin Cancer Foundation, skin cancer is the most common cancer in the United States; one in five Americans will develop it during their lifetime. In 2016, it is estimated that 144,860 new cases of melanoma, the most deadly form of skin cancer, will be diagnosed in the United States. And while fair-skinned people are at the greatest risk, anyone can develop skin cancer.

The best defense against skin cancer is a two-pronged approach: prevention and detection.

**Facts to know**

According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the SPF, or Sun Protection Factor, of a sunscreen, is not a measure of how much time you can spend in the sun without getting burned. Rather, it indicates the intensity of the solar energy which would result in a sunburn; and this varies by time of day, location and the weather conditions. For example, an hour of sun exposure at 9 a.m. may produce the same amount of exposure as 15 minutes at 1 p.m. Exposure is less on a cloudy day, but greater in a location which is highly reflective, for instance on a beach or on a boat.

The eyelids are among the most common locations for non-melanoma skin cancers; this can lead to serious complications, including blindness, if not caught in time. So even if the glare doesn’t bother you, it’s important to protect your eyelids by using sunblock and wearing sunglasses that wrap around your face and that block UV rays.

You are not fully protected from the sun’s rays in the car, even if you don’t hang your arm out the window. Glass generally blocks only UVB rays, and although car windshields are treated to partially filter out UVA, the side and rear windows and the sunroof are not.

The Skin Cancer Foundation offers these tips for prevention:

- Seek the shade, especially between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- Avoid tanning and UV tanning beds.
- Cover up with clothing, including a broad-brimmed hat and UV-blocking sunglasses.
- Use a broad spectrum (UVA/UVB) sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher every day. For extended outdoor activity, use a water-resistant, broad spectrum (UVA/UVB) sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher.
- Apply sunscreen to your entire body 30 minutes before going outside. Re-apply every two hours or immediately after swimming or excessive sweating.
- Keep newborns out of the sun. Sunscreens should be used on babies over the age of six months.

**Spotting problems**

Skin cancer can present in a wide variety of ways. If you notice something that is not healing, or looks unusual, even if it does not match the standard descriptions below, it is best to have a doctor check it. The Skin Cancer Foundation recommends monthly self-examination and an annual checkup with a doctor. Following are guidelines provided by the Skin Cancer Foundation regarding what to look for when doing a self-examination:

- A skin growth that increases in size and appears pearly, translucent, tan, brown, black or multicolored
- A mole, birthmark, beauty mark or any brown spot that changes color; increases in size or thickness; changes in texture; is irregular in outline; or is bigger than 6mm or 1/4”, the size of a pencil eraser
- A spot or sore that continues to itch, hurt, crust, scab, erode or bleed
- An open sore that does not heal within three weeks

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The first thing Alice Wootson remembers writing was a poem in the fifth grade. “I loved language – we had to study Latin in those days – and I also loved reading,” she says.

Now 78, she has won prizes for her poetry from the Pennsylvania Poetry Society. She also is part of the wryly-named Mad Poets Society. She has also written 13 published novels, with four more not yet published. Inspiration can come from news stories, snippets of publicized scandals and feuds, or her own imagination. Her “Escape to Love,” for example, was inspired by the story of reputed Philadelphia mobster, Joey Merlino. Another sprang to life on the notion of being misidentified as someone and wrongly placed on the Homeland Security risk list.

Wootson grew up in a tiny town outside of Pittsburgh. Rankin, Pa. was just one mile long and six streets wide. Life was contained; snug; and, at least most of the time, predictable. Her father, a widower, worked in a steel mill, and Alice was the oldest of seven children. “It was such an innocent, simple time. We went to the movies on Saturdays and church on Sundays,” this prolific poet/writer remembers.

There were 53 students in Wootson’s high school graduating class; and all these years later, she insists that she can’t remember any one of them who ever got in serious trouble. “Cutting school was regarded as a major crime.”

But the 1950s were not an idyllic time for Wootson, even in tiny Rankin. “There were no black majorettes or cheerleaders in our high school back in 1955. The excuse was that there were not enough uniforms to go around,” she says. Yes, that stung; and yes, she felt resentment. She recognized injustice when she saw it. She still does.

Her life path led to her first job as a nurse’s aide, then to college at Cheyney University and to a teaching degree. In 1960, she married her husband, Isaiah; they settled in the Philadelphia area and had three sons. Tragically, they lost their middle son to leukemia.

Like so many women, Wootson became an expert juggler, balancing family life and teaching elementary school children. She loved fourth and fifth graders who would pose amazingly intriguing questions about the world. And after a total of 31 years of teaching, she heard profound ones she delights in remembering. “Wouldn’t life be better if money didn’t exist?” one lad asked her. His insight took her breath away.

Wootson also sat on the school board in Sharon Hill, where she lived, and didn’t mind at all being called a “rabble-rouser” because her causes were issues like guard rails and traffic lights to protect children.

Now a retired teacher, Wootson is a recognized writer and member of the Author’s Guild, who serves on the board of the Philadelphia’s Writers Conference, and has broken a barrier recently as the only black writer to be published by the Prism Book Group.

“We’re not a major publishing house, but it’s something,” Wootson says. “I write as a hobby.”

“Writing gets into the blood and the marrow,” she says.

Case in point: “Sometimes, I try to walk away from a writing project, but a character starts calling me back. I know it sounds weird, but that’s what happens,” the writer insists. “And if I promised that character that I’ll pick up where I left off, I keep that promise. It’s the least I can do!”

Sally Friedman can be reached at pinegander@aol.com
Milestones 5                                May 2016

Women of many backgrounds, cultures and beliefs find common ground in music

Members of the Anna Crusis Women’s Choir perform a wide range of music, from many different ethnic and cultural traditions

By Constance Garcia-Barrio

Music may have charms to soothe a savage beast, as a 17th century English playwright once wrote. Miriam Davidson, director of Anna Crusis Women’s Choir, would add that it can also open hearts and minds. Anna Crusis, which celebrated its 40th anniversary last year, is known for regaling audiences with spirited melodies and thoughtful messages. “We don’t hit audiences over the head,” said Davidson, 60, of Northwest Philadelphia. “We’re pretty grassroots. We have something for everyone.”

Anna Crusis, which takes its name from the term for an upbeat entrance to a musical phrase, grew from founder Catherine Roma’s desire to carve out a place for women in the 1976 Bicentennial celebration. “Catherine wanted to present a program that embodied women’s contributions to America’s past,” Davidson said, “something that would take them from the shadows to center stage. Catherine was a Quaker, and her passion for social justice wove through her work.”

Singing sanctuary

Anna Crusis quickly gained momentum. “Catherine unearthed music by women composers and pulled them out of obscurity,” Davidson said. Something else happened too. The choir became a haven of safety and connection for women of different races, religions, social classes and generations. Members range in age from 20s to well into their 70s. Anna Crusis, which includes gay and straight women, is a charter member of the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses (GALA), the world’s only association devoted to the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) choral movement.

The choir is inclusive in another way. Its repertoire represents women from Eastern Europe, Africa and other parts of the world. “Sometimes that means learning other languages, but it’s good to mix it up,” Davidson said.

Chance first led Davidson to Anna Crusis. “Some friends of mine knew that more voices were needed to give the chorus a richer sound, and they persuaded me to attend a rehearsal,” said Davidson. It was a natural fit. Davidson, originally from Long Island, had grown up steeped in music. Her father was a cantor and a composer of Jewish liturgical music, and her mother was a pianist, singer and music teacher.

Hooked by the rehearsal, Davidson sang with Anna Crusis for two years. She took a hiatus and teamed up with a friend to form a two-woman traveling ensemble. “We toured the country for 15 years,” said Davidson, who plays the accordion, guitar, banjo, piano and drums. “I blossomed as a musician during that time, and I learned how to plan a tour, choose venues and other skills that I use every day with Anna Crusis.”

Under Davidson’s direction since 2012, the choir has grown from 30 to 60 members. “We are always looking for new singers as well as maintaining a good balance of returning and new members,” Davidson said. She’s considering adding visuals during some concerts. “When we performed at International House at Penn last year, short films created by one of our singers and images from local artists were projected in the background while we sang,” she said. “It went well.”

The visual dimension may become part of the choir’s program, but the aim of Anna Crusis remains the same. “If the audience leaves educated, empowered and inspired, we’ve done our job,” Davidson said.

Anna Crusis will hold auditions in August. The choir’s next concert is Friday, June 3 and Saturday, June 4, 7:30 p.m., at Trinity Center for Urban Life, 22nd and Spruce Streets. Tickets can be purchased online. For more information about the choir, go to www.annacrusis.org or call 267-825-SING (7464).

Constance Garcia-Barrio is a freelance writer and author of a novel based on African-American history in Philadelphia.
Collaboration brings seniors, young artists together in jewelry-making classes

By Alicia M. Colombo

This spring, more than two dozen seniors travelled from all over the city, some as far away as the Northeast, for weekly jewelry-making classes at South Philadelphia Older Adult Center. Students from Moore College of Art & Design brought their skills and supplies to teach the seniors a variety of techniques, including wire-wrapping and beadwork.

Elaine Zeaman, age 76, was inspired to tackle jewelry-making for the first time. “I thought it would be something new and different,” she said. “We started off easy — stringing beads on wire for a bracelet. Then, we moved on to more difficult metal work. It’s challenging, but I’m enjoying it,” said Zeaman.

Zeaman is a member of Northeast Older Adult Center, one of the six City of Philadelphia Parks & Recreation Senior Centers which collaborated with Moore to present this, and other classes, over the past year.

“This semester’s curriculum is very diverse and open-ended enough so that both the novice and expert jewelry maker will be trying something for the first time,” said Amanda Newman-Godfrey, assistant professor of Art Education at Moore College of Art & Design, who oversees the class.

“When choosing the mediums and art forms for the class, I sit down with folks from Philadelphia Corporation for Aging (PCA) and Philadelphia Parks & Recreation to discuss the skills that seniors are interested in acquiring and what courses may not be available at all of the centers,” Newman-Godfrey said. “The students design the activity stations for the course based on their own interests and skill set.”

Jewelry-making stations included letter and beaded bracelets; recycled material jewelry, such as cuff bracelets and pins; text-based jewelry made of woven, rolled newspaper strips; and wire-wrapping stones for necklaces and rings.

“The students are there to help you create,” said Sylvia Bey, a member of both Juniata Park Older Adult Center and Philadelphia Senior Center – Avenue of The Arts. “They’re more engaged in the creative process and less concerned about mechanics or specific steps. You get one-on-one instruction, which you don’t usually get at a senior center art class,” said Bey.

Participants ranged from amateur to experienced artisans, like 75-year-old Allen Dorsey. “I get semiprecious stones and other natural materials, like wood, bone and amethyst, from overseas,” said Dorsey, a member of the Juniata Park Older Adult Center. “I took this class because I wanted to see what I could do with these materials. I’m always looking for new ideas. I met a vendor from India who piqued my interest. I was able to buy some of his wares to set myself up. I would like to blend the items that I acquired in class with some of my own. I did sell some things when I was actively creating, and would like to get back into it,” he said.

Mutual benefit

“At first, I was concerned how my students would react to this generation, which is two generations in age away from them,” said Newman-Godfrey. “Some of my students are freshmen. They haven’t had experience teaching. At first, the students were nervous. But after the first session, the nerves went away. The students couldn’t believe how excited the seniors were to learn something new. They thought the seniors would be tough on them because they’re so young and think that they didn’t have anything to teach them. The students and teachers are both learners, so it levels the playing field. They absolutely adore the seniors,” she said.

The art classes were held in the late afternoon so the seniors wouldn’t miss out on what’s going on at their own centers earlier in the day. “This program is an extension of some of the things that each of the centers are doing,” said Barbara Gillette, acting director of Older Adult Services for Philadelphia Parks & Recreation. “For example, West Oak Lane Senior Center is really strong in jewelry making,” she said.

This is the third consecutive semester of art classes provided through the collaboration between Moore and the city’s senior centers under the umbrella of “Engaging Students in Community Arts.” The first course was digital photography and bookmaking, offered last spring at South Philadelphia Older Adult Center. In the fall, three-dimensional sculpture classes were held at Juniata Park Older Adult Center. Planning for additional courses is already underway. For information, call Barbara Gillette at 215-685-2715.

Contact Alicia M. Colombo at acolombo@pcaphl.org
Nilda Oppenheimer’s desire to volunteer grew out of her own experience of vulnerability. Three years ago, Oppenheimer experienced hairline fractures on both ankles and required surgery. When she came home, she needed help until she was fully recovered and able to do things for herself. Upon recovery, while looking for a way to help others in her age group, she discovered the Senior Companion Program (SCP), which pairs adults age 55 and older with homebound, isolated elders to provide a social connection and help with household tasks.

Now Oppenheimer, 71, dedicates four hours a day, four days a week, to visiting Pedro Alvarez, a homebound elderly man, providing help with small tasks and companionship. Alvarez and Oppenheimer have something important besides age in common – both are natives of Puerto Rico, and both speak Spanish. SCP administrators say bilingual companions like Oppenheimer are much needed, to serve non-English-speaking seniors like Alvarez.

The Senior Companion Program is administered by Philadelphia Corporation for Aging (PCA). Duties typically include conversation and reading; light meal preparation; accompaniment to medical appointments; errands and light shopping; and respite for caregivers. Senior Companions receive a stipend and other benefits.

Oppenheimer and Alvarez were matched by North City Congress (NCC), a multi-service organization serving North and North Central Philadelphia, which has a large Latino population. Alvarez is served by PCA’s In-Home Support Program (IHSP), which NCC manages in that part of the city.

On Oppenheimer’s first visit, Alvarez, excited that she was coming, had dressed formally in a suit to greet her. “You don’t have to do this for me,” she told him. “I am coming to help you.”

Oppenheimer and Alvarez enjoy watching Spanish-language television shows and playing games – Parcheesi is a favorite. She helps run errands for him, and lately, he’s asked her to teach him some English. He receives home-delivered meals, and she sets the table and heats the meals as needed. While he is reluctant to venture out of the house due to his heart condition, she encourages him to take short walks with her in the fresh air.

“I love to help people, especially older people,” Oppenheimer says.

PCA matched Melida Blackwell, 82, with Maria Lopez, an elderly homebound Puerto Rican immigrant who speaks no English and who receives PCA long-term care services. Blackwell visited with Lopez for six years. This winter, Lopez became too ill to continue with the program. Blackwell, who is currently...
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Crafting leather helps sustain her spirit

By Constance García-Barrio

Shimmering semi-precious stones inlaid in handmade handbags have become the signature of master leather-crafter Arleen Olshan. “I use stones from around the world, including some you may seldom see,” said Olshan, 71, of Mt. Airy.

Olshan says fate must have guided her, more than 50 years ago, to a store that sold hand-crafted goods. “At 17, with a high school diploma, I had just moved to New York to study drawing at the Art Students’ League,” she said. “I wanted a pair of sandals, but I found that I didn’t have enough money. The owner and I talked, and he agreed to teach me how to make sandals.”

Olshan proved so adept that she began working in the store. “I learned how to buy, cut and sew leather,” she said. In time, she returned to Philadelphia with a trade and the necessary tools. She held down various jobs during the day and at night, she made leather goods and studied painting. “I taught English as a second language, prepped people for the GED exam, tutored kids, co-owned a bookstore named Giovanni’s Room, and helped make holiday displays at Wanamaker’s,” she said. “I also became an addictions counselor at Jefferson University Hospital. Whatever else I did, crafting leather sustained my spirit.”

Twist of fate

Fate then dealt Olshan a wild card. One day, she was running to catch a bus to deliver leather items to Center City boutiques when she was hit by a car. With her back injured, she couldn’t continue her craft. “Pain would shoot up my neck every time I hammered leather.”

A friend referred her to the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation where an empathetic counselor helped her get a scholarship to the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. “What a gift that was! I was 29 when I started there, and I got straight As.”

Olshan gradually resumed working with leather while in art school, and she began inlaying rose quartz, agate, turquoise and other semi-precious stones in her belts, handbags and leather jewelry boxes. “Each stone is different, so each item is different. It’s like carrying around a unique part of the earth,” said Olshan, who’s become a fixture at the Philadelphia Folk Festival, feminist gatherings and other venues.

Eager for community, she launched the Mt. Airy Art Garage (MAAG), 11 W. Mt. Airy Ave., seven years ago. It provides studio and exhibition space for 150 artists, many of them 60 or older. MAAG also hosts arts events and brings together such unlikely collaborators as autistic children from the Houston School and fragile seniors. Together, they made a stunning mural. “MAAG always needs volunteers and welcomes new members,” Olshan said. “We would like art to touch more and more people.” To learn more about MAAG, go to www.mtairyartgarage.org or call 267-240-3302.

Constance Garcia-Barrio is a freelance writer and author of a novel based on African-American history in Philadelphia.
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### Senior art exhibits and free receptions

Five art exhibits are on display this month at the following venues. Artists’ receptions, which are free and open to the public, will be held at four of the exhibit sites.

- **Art in City Hall**, 1401 JFK Blvd. (Gallery hours: weekdays, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.) Wednesday, May 4, 4:30 to 6:30 p.m.
- **The Gershman Y**, 401 S. Broad St. (Gallery hours: Monday through Saturday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Sunday, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.) Thursday, May 12, 4 to 6 p.m.
- **West Philadelphia Senior Community Center**, 1016-26 N. 41st St. (41st and Poplar Sts.) (Gallery hours: Monday through Friday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.) Wednesday, May 18, 4 to 6 p.m.
- **Center on the Hill ... the place for active adults**, 8855 Germantown Ave. (adjacent to the Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill) (Gallery hours: weekdays, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Sundays, 9 a.m. to noon.) Tuesday, May 24, 4 to 6 p.m.

*Celebrate Arts and Aging is sponsored by Always Best Care Senior Services, Health Partners Plans, JEVS at Home and PECO.*

### Celebrate the arts all year round, with free and discounted admissions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event / Venue</th>
<th>Date / Time</th>
<th>Details / Highlights</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>First Fridays at Spring Garden Center</strong></td>
<td>First Friday of the month</td>
<td>Free monthly events showcase works by some of Philadelphia’s finest visual artists, and feature a variety of film screenings, literary readings and exhibits of paintings, photographs and sculptures. Spring Garden Senior Center 1221 Spring Garden St. springgardencenter.blogspot.com 215-787-2944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First Sundays at the Barnes Foundation</strong></td>
<td>First Sunday of the month</td>
<td>Free admission to this internationally-renowned collection of Impressionist, post-Impressionist, African and Native American art. The Barnes Foundation 2025 Benjamin Franklin Parkway <a href="http://www.barnesfoundation.org">www.barnesfoundation.org</a> 215-278-7000</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Pay-What-You-Wish at the Philadelphia Museum of Art</strong></td>
<td>First Sunday of the month, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. &amp; every Wednesday, 5-8:45 p.m.</td>
<td>Explore this vast collection of art, architecture, tools, toys, film and furniture that covers the full range of visual and decorative arts and every corner of the globe, from ancient to contemporary times. Philadelphia Museum of Art 2600 Benjamin Franklin Parkway <a href="http://www.philamuseum.org">www.philamuseum.org</a> 215-763-8100</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>40th Street Summer Series</strong></td>
<td>June 18, July 23, August 20, September 17</td>
<td>Free monthly outdoor concerts in University City. 40th and Walnut Sts., behind the Walnut Street Library <a href="http://www.universitycity.org">www.universitycity.org</a> 215-243-0555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First Wednesdays at Please Touch Museum</strong></td>
<td>First Wednesday of the month, 4-7 p.m. Reduced $2 admission first Wednesday of the month. Please Touch Museum Memorial Hall, Fairmount Park, 4231 Avenue of the Republic <a href="http://www.pleasetouchmuseum.org">www.pleasetouchmuseum.org</a> 215-581-3181</td>
<td>Take the grandchildren for a spin on a 1908 carousel, and come along as they have hands-on fun with pint-sized cars and sailboats, or take a magical trip down the rabbit hole to Wonderland.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Old City Experience: First Fridays</strong></td>
<td>First Friday of the month</td>
<td>Cutting-edge paintings, sculpture, ceramics, photography and fiber art on display at these monthly open house events at galleries in Philadelphia’s arts district. 230 Vine St. and locations throughout Old City <a href="http://www.oldcityarts.org">www.oldcityarts.org</a> 215-625-9200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
215-763-8100. $  
1 1 a.m. Art Cart includes drop-in games, jewelry, art & collectibles. 1 1 a.m. to 8 p.m. South Philadelphia Senior Center. 215-727-0800 - Avenue of the Arts & West Phila. Senior Community Center. See page 21 for more information on pricing or other questions about an event.

Mother’s Day  
A "Single Shard."  
9:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. Franklin Square. 215-629-4026. (Through Dec. 31)

Philadelphia Chamber Music Society Presents: Clarissa Quartet.  
7:30 p.m. Kimmel Center, Verizon Hall. 215-247-4654.

This year’s theme is “Awaken the Spirit.”  
November: "Handmade art & crafts by local artisans. Warm up with comfort food, local beers & photos. 8:30 a.m. St. Charles Senior Center. 215-790-9530. (Through June 26)

2016 Celebration of Black Arts Legacy Awards.  
Honors outstanding contributors to Black literature, art & community. 215-426-9799. (Through May 31)

Celebrate Arts & Aging Reception.  
6:30 p.m. 215-569-8080. $  
8 p.m. Lutheran Church of the Holy Communion. 215-743-3081.  
Butler & Vocalist Shamika Byrd’s: 8 p.m., Jazz Residency Artists Pianist Kendrah Dorey & Violinist Lana Trotovsek.

Memorial Day  
Refrshment Station Food Service.  
10 a.m. to 6 p.m. 215-569-8080.

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(Through May 31)
PECO has dedicated nearly a century of support to the arts, music and creativity

By Marcia Z. Siegal

A 1920 play program from the Walnut Street Theatre lists the Philadelphia Electric Company (now PECO) among the production’s chief supporters. “It shows how far back our commitment to arts and culture goes,” said Romona Riscoe Benson, PECO corporate relations director.

The commitment has endured and expanded, to include support of activities ranging from Philadelphia Museum of Art exhibits to regional theater company productions to the PECO Multicultural Series at Penn’s Landing to Philadelphia Corporation for Aging’s (PCA’s) “Celebrate Arts and Aging” events. (See page 1.) In 2015, the company invested more than $1 million in arts and culture in the five-county Philadelphia region. Some of its support is provided in conjunction with Exelon, its parent company.

Benson said that PECO’s support aims to showcase the variety of arts and cultural venues in the Greater Philadelphia region, which encompass a wide range of tastes and ages in visual arts, spoken and written word, film, dance, music, and theater. The company’s support makes arts and culture more accessible to a wider audience, including low-income communities.

PECO-sponsored Free First Sundays at the Barnes Foundation provide free admission, once a month, on a first-come, first-served basis to the museum’s unparalleled collection of art, which includes masterpieces by Renoir, VanGogh and Picasso; an extensive collection of African sculpture; and Native American ceramics and jewelry. “Because no matter what your age and your economic background, you should have the opportunity to participate in art and culture if you would like to do so,” Benson said. (See pages 10-11 for information about this and other free or discounted arts events.)

In addition to purely philanthropic motives, she said, “it’s a good investment from a business perspective. Arts and culture generate more than $1 billion a year in economic impact, so they’re also important to the economic development and vitality of our region,” Benson said.

Philadelphia’s rich ethnic diversity also inspires PECO’s philanthropy. Among others, the PECO Multicultural Series at Penn’s Landing (nine Sunday events, June through September) offers up a series of free outdoor festivals – Mexican, African, Hispanic, Indian, Caribbean, Irish and more – featuring musical performances and dancing, along with ethnic foods, arts and crafts, and other merchandise.

For the past 11 years, PECO has been the lead sponsor of PCA’s month-long Celebrate Arts and Aging festivities in May. All of the artists are invited to a recognition luncheon hosted by PECO, during which a slideshow plays, showcasing each of the artworks on display in venues throughout the city. “It’s joyful to see so many participants come together from across the city,” Benson said of the luncheon. “We see participants’ faces light up when their work is shown for everybody in the room to see and listen to them share stories about their art. It’s a nice day for us. We love the fact that we are able to enjoy this event with the seniors,” she said.

Contact Marcia Z. Siegal at msiegel@pcaphl.org
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In Season

**Colorful vegetables combine to make a simple but delicious “Spring Sauté”**

A colorful bounty of Pennsylvania spring vegetables will be in season this month. Among them are the asparagus, onion, peas and radishes used in this easy and healthy recipe. These sautéed vegetables will pair well with any meat as a side dish. It could also be the base for a stir-fry with grilled turkey sausage, beef tips or chicken strips.

**Spring Vegetable Sauté**
(4 servings)

**Ingredients:**
- 1 tsp. olive oil
- 1/2 cup sweet onion, sliced
- 1 garlic clove, finely chopped
- 3 new potatoes (tiny), quartered
- 3/4 cup carrot, sliced
- 3/4 cup asparagus pieces
- 3/4 cup sugar snap peas or green beans
- 1/2 cup radishes, quartered
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- 1/4 tsp. black pepper
- 1/2 tsp. dill, dried

**Directions:**
Heat the oil in a skillet. Cook onion for 2 minutes, add garlic and cook another minute.

Stir in potatoes and carrots. Cover, turn the heat to low, and cook until almost tender, about 4 minutes.

If the vegetables start to brown, add 1-2 tbsp. of water.

Now, add the asparagus, peas, radishes, salt, pepper and dill. Cook, stirring often, until just tender – about 4 minutes more. Serve immediately.

Source: National Cancer Institute

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May 2016

Celebrate arts

* continued from page 1 *

This year’s signature artwork, “Summer Strawberries,” is a watercolor by 70-year-old Ellen Baer, who says it draws on childhood memories of visits to a family farm in Virginia where she and her cousins would often pick strawberries. The hat worn by the woman in the picture was inspired by straw hats worn by her older aunts at the farm. A retired Philadelphia public school teacher, Baer currently teaches two arts classes for older adult students at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Temple University in Center City, where she says she “enjoys inspiring students to challenge their creativity and explore their own unique gifts.”

The celebration is held in May each year to coincide with Older Americans Month. Exhibits showcase older adults’ artistry, and the celebration also provides seniors with the chance to experience the arts through classes, workshops and performances, and by connecting to the area’s many arts and cultural offerings.

Art all year round

Senior community centers offer prime opportunities for artistic growth and enjoyment during May and year-round. Participants can take a stained glass class; learn tap dance or salsa; try their hand at painting or drawing; or take a drama class and perform for their peers. They can also study photography and ceramics; learn filmmaking; and join in poetry discussions and writing workshops. Crafters can find others who are like-minded in sewing and needlework classes and groups. For music lovers, there are glee clubs and choruses; and piano, ukulele, violin and guitar lessons are available.

Check with the individual centers listed on page 21 to find out about arts activities or go to the PCA website, www.pcaCares.org/events-search to find classes and arts and cultural events.

Special discounts are available to seniors for a number of arts venues and performances for Celebrate Arts and Aging, among them: the Pennsylvania Ballet, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and the Philadelphia Orchestra. (See pages 10-11 for details about these and other discounts.)
Gift

“Kathran’s been carving wood for 40 or 50 years,” Todd said. “She’s something of a rarity, since woodcarving is a largely male occupation.” Her whimsically carved wooden salad servers, cheese spreaders and other implements have brightly colored handles that curve and sprout like roots and vegetables.

Siegel’s daughter, Cassandra Petruchyk, applies her artistic talents to creating striking illustrations of birds and animals she encounters at The Schuykill Center’s Wildlife Rehabilitation Clinic where she volunteers.

James McNabb makes cityscapes or city wheels, wooden skylines carved in a curved shape so that four of them together make a circle. “He gets orders from all over the world,” Todd said. “In fact, he’s received so many that he has enough work for the next 18 months.”

A blend of ages and experience among the shop’s artists amps up creativity, according to Todd. “The younger artists bring a special energy to the shop,” he said.

While devoted to his craft, Todd, an avid reader, finds time to indulge in books, and to read Latin and Greek. “I took those languages in school, and I still like to dabble in them,” said Todd, who also enjoys hiking and canoeing. Yet, his woodland treks return him to his roots and his artistry.

“I’ve always liked birds. In the fifth grade, I joined the Audubon Society. I would get a booklet about birds in the mail four or five times a year,” said Todd, some of whose favorite works have inlaid designs of birds made with slivers of wood of different colors. “I realized the other day that with the marquetry of birds I’ve returned to my old liking.”

For more information about ‘Tis a Gift, visit www.tisagiftmairy.com or call 215-264-2062.

Constance Garcia-Barrio is a freelance writer and author of a novel based on African-American history in Philadelphia.

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Anyone who receives SNAP benefits (formerly known as food stamps) can use the EBT/ACCESS card to visit more than 30 different museums, gardens, historic sites and attractions for an admission price of just $2 each. Just show your ACCESS card and a photo ID, and you can take up to three additional friends or family members, also at $2 each. Visitors must pay the admission price, the ACCESS card cannot be used to pay.

A few of the participating sites are the Franklin Institute, (regular admission: $19.95) the African American Museum in Philadelphia (regularly $10 for seniors); Philadelphia History Museum (regularly $8 for seniors); Barnes Foundation (regularly $20 weekdays, $23 weekends for seniors); Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site (regularly $12 for seniors) and Morris Arboretum (regularly $15 for seniors).

The ACCESS admission discount is not valid on special exhibitions or features, or with any other offer or group rate.

Last year, more than 34,000 people visited museums and attractions for $2 each through the ACCESS program, which is led by Art-Reach, and sponsored by the Dolfinger McMahon Foundation, Fels Printing, Henrietta Tower Wurts Memorial, Lindback Foundation and PECO.

For a complete list of participating sites, visit www.art-reach.org/programs/access-admission/museums or call 267-515-6720.

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Companions

- continued from page 7

in the process of being matched with a new consumer, says her past experience inspired a caring relationship on both sides.


Lopez “was always very happy to see me. Each day I would come, we would say to each other, ‘Buenos días (Good morning).’ Then it was ‘Cómo estás? (How are you?)’ I would ask her, ‘Qué citas tienes? (What appointments do you have?)’ On Mondays, we would ask each other ‘Qué tal el fin de semana? (How was your weekend?)’ She would always ask me if I saw my grandchildren and always wanted to hear about them.”

Blackwell helped her fill out forms, went to the store for her and accompanied her to medical appointments. The two also read and watched TV together, including “La Rosa de Guadalupe,” a Mexican series dramatizing real-life miracles, dreams and spiritual moments.

Lopez had a home care aide to prepare meals for her, and Blackwell would advise the aide how to cook foods the consumer liked, using yams, plantains, rice and beans, and other vegetables prepared Latin-style.

Blackwell says that Alvarez did not leave her apartment at all, aside from medical appointments. “My visits were important to her,” says Blackwell. She never wanted me to leave. ‘You’re going?’ she would say. ‘Is it time already? Now what will I do?’”

To volunteer or to learn more about Senior Companions, call 215-765-9000, ext. 5126 or email tmoore@pcaphl.org

*Names have been changed to protect the privacy of these individuals.

Contact Marcia Z. Siegal at msiegel@pcaphl.org

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TO LEARN MORE, please contact Eli Mikkelsen at the Center for the Neuromodulation in Depression and Stress at 215-573-0085 or by email at emikkel@mail.med.upenn.edu.
She finds joy in capturing life stories

By Barbara L. Sherf

I became a personal historian purely by chance. After creating a small book of stories and photos with my father, I was asked to capture the family history of Lula Pidcock Mohr, a descendant of Jonathan Pidcock, the first white settler of Bucks County. During our interview sessions, Mrs. Mohr shared the good, the bad and the ugly. When it came time to put her stories into print, I made it clear that she had the final say on what was included, but I know the telling of all of her stories gave her closure.

Indeed, in her 93rd year, she was taken fairly quickly by cancer. While in a hospice setting, her son brought a big screen TV and a looped version of a video we produced, and she insisted it be played for 48 hours straight up to her passing. It was a comfort to her to see that the history had been recorded, and I suspect she wanted to share this version of her life with the staff as opposed to being a cancer victim dying in a rehab center.

As a personal historian, I have experienced firsthand the power of closure in telling one's story. I've also experienced the opposite. My mother would have none of it. She did allow me to ask her questions and write down some very minor details about some of the people in old photos and the relationships; however, when I probed farther she would zip her lip. I suspect she wanted her children to remember the happier times and not be burdened by the sad stories.

If you have thought about capturing your own family's history, and have met with a positive response, here are some tips to get you started.

1) Begin by putting down the bullet points of the individual's life as an outline and flesh it out from there. If you never get beyond the bullets, at least your family will have the correct information for a proper obituary, eulogy or memorial pamphlet. Choose one good photo of you that can be used for this purpose and put it and the bullet points aside with your important papers and tell your family where these documents are and how to access them.

2) Consider enrolling in a memoir class to flesh out the details, or work with a friend, family member or personal historian to tease out your stories. The Association of Personal Historians (www.personalhistorians.org) has a list of professionals by zip code on its website. Prices vary by project, but honestly, think about what you would spend on a vacation and put it aside. It is the gift that will continue to give for generations to come. Children and grandchildren can be encouraged to forgo future (both yours and theirs) holiday and birthday gifts to put the funds into the personal history project pot.

3) Free resources are available on the web. Go to www.rememberswhen.com for up to 16 different worksheets. The International Association of Storykeepers (www.legacystories.org) has free resources, as well as subscription services where one can record their stories and upload images. My caution in this is that sometimes these stories are lost if not archived properly, so make sure you have a printout of whatever you produce as backup and put it with your family Bible or important papers.

May is Personal History Awareness Month. For a complete resource list, or more information, contact Barbara L. Sherf at 215-233-8022 or e-mail CaptureLifeStories@gmail.com.
Senior athletes, aged 50 and older, from the five-county Southeastern Pennsylvania area are gearing up to take part in the annual Philadelphia Games for Adults 50+. Presented each year by the Philadelphia Parks & Recreation Department, the games offer a variety of events for competitors of all sporting interests and physical abilities, from fitness demonstrations and board games to basketball and a triathlon.

If you register by Friday, May 6, you can take advantage of the half-price early-bird discount rate and pay only $10. After this date, registration will cost $20. Same-day registration will be available if space permits. For registration forms and information, call 215-683-3683 or visit www.philadelphiagames.org.

Schedule of events

Saturday, June 4
Events held at Lincoln High School, 3201 Ryan Ave.

Registration & Expo – 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Opening Ceremony – 9 a.m.
Fitness Demos – 9:30 a.m. to noon
Muscle Toning – 9:30 to 10:30 a.m.
Tai Chi Clinic – 10:30 to 11 a.m.
Self Defense Clinic – 11 a.m. to noon

Outdoor events
Track & Field; Football Throw – 10 a.m. start
Horseshoes – 11 a.m. start
Softball Throw; Pitch, Hit & Run – 11:30 a.m. start

Indoor events
Basketball; Table Tennis; Stationary Bike – 1 p.m.
Swimming – 2 to 3 p.m.

Monday, June 6
Women’s Billiards Tournament – 10 a.m. start
West Oak Lane Senior Center, 7210 Ogontz Ave.
Evening Bowling – Check-in 6 p.m.; 7 p.m. start
V&S Lanes, 7235 Elmwood Ave.

Tuesday, June 7
Evening Basketball – 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.
Hank Gathers Recreation Center, 2501 W. Diamond St.

Wednesday, June 8
Daytime Bowling – Check-in 10 a.m.; 11 a.m. start
Thunderbird Lanes, 3801 Holme Ave.

Thursday, June 9
Putting, Golf & Driving Contest – 8 a.m. start
John F. Byrnes Golf Course, 9500 Leon St.

Friday, June 10
Game Day: Chess; Checkers; Pinochle; Scrabble; Dominoes; Darts; Men’s Billiards; Mahjong – 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Northeast Older Adult Center, 8100 Bustleton Ave.; and West Oak Lane Senior Center, 7210 Ogontz Ave.

Saturday, July 16
Triathlon – 6:30 a.m. registration; 7 a.m. start
Fairmount Park – Memorial Hall, Kelly Pool, 4210 N. Concourse Dr.
Boys would be boys – every occasion a chance to punch, swat or torment

Yet another birthday. These are the “golden years,” we’re told. Some of us go along with this fiction (usually to humor those propounding it), but there isn’t one of us who wouldn’t like to be healthier, stronger and prettier — the way we used to be.

And as anxiety-provoking as the uncertainty was, wondering about our future was exciting. Now, no more suspense — the future is here.

Each day brings each of us one day closer to the end. But it used to be something far off, not worth our attention. Now, it’s just around the corner.

It’s not necessarily something to fear. Much more frightening is increasing incapacity and dependence. Simple routine processes are ever more challenging, like getting in and out of the car, rising from an easy chair, or lacing shoes.

Yet, we’re much better off than preceding generations. Thanks to Social Security, television, health care advances, modern technology and agencies like PCA, we needn’t stagnate unproductively in the rocking chair, lamenting how much better things were “in my day.”

As I’ve said before, as long as we’re here, old timer, every day is “our day,” as much as anyone’s.

* * *

And one for good luck

For a boy in West Philly, birthdays were a mixed blessing. Sure, there might be a cake (with candles) and maybe a party, but you could get a sore arm, too.

A time-honored ritual was punches on the arm — one for each year, plus one for good luck. Just how sore your arm became depended on how old you were, the number of well-wishers and the intensity of their dedication to tradition.

Fortunately, it was a custom we outgrew. If not, a birthday at this late date could require so many punches that by the one for good luck, it would be almost time for the next birthday — if the Birthday Boy survived the trauma.

This was one of several barbaric rituals boys underwent. Another was “Swats.” After a haircut, if another boy cried “Swats,” he was entitled to swat the back of your shorn head.

Unlike the birthday brutality, however, there was a defense against Swats — vigilance. If you called out “No Swats” first, the back of your head was safe. So, when you left the barbershop, you’d brace yourself for the threat, prepared to forestall it.

For girls, by the way, these rituals did not exist. They could celebrate birthdays painlessly, and go unswatted after their hair was cut.

But girls, of course, were more civilized.

Or, maybe, they had less of a feel for tradition.

* * *

A breathtaking mission

Enough of this nostalgia. I must save my breath.

All those candles to blow out!

Milestones Editor Emeritus Don Harrison served as deputy editor of the Daily News opinion pages and as assistant managing editor and city editor of the Philadelphia Bulletin.
Doing it right: Caring about neighbors, not numbers.

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