

FRIENDSHIP VILLAGE

Senior Living Community

WHERE CONNECTIONS MATTER

Many of us don't really know the history of the founding of Friendship Village. Who better to tell it than someone who lived it? This account was written in 1981 by resident Hazel VanHorn.

FRIENDSHIP VILLAGE – AND HOW IT STARTED

Most residents who moved to Friendship Village after it was completed know little of the experience of the “early settlers.” This should interest them and should also refresh memories for the “pioneers.”

- Hazel VanHorn

Ground breaking day! Sunday, October 28, 1973, marked the beginning of Kalamazoo's Friendship Village. Those who had made the decision to make the Village their future home (and made the initial deposit), with other interested and semi-interested people, gathered at the Drake Road building site to witness the turning of the first shovel of dirt. It was a cold, windy day, but there were warm feelings inside, as Archie and John Markillie, Peter VanderLaan, and others pulled the bulldozer that broke the ground.

After a few speeches, including Dr. Berg, the originator of it all, there were prayers. (We learned later how much we needed those prayers.) Jim Chase, who knew so many of the potential buyers, was present. Harvey Beck, sales coordinator for Life Care, came to the event, and

did his bit to make everyone happy and confident. It was a great and exciting day.

For some time there had been a model apartment in a small building on Northhampton Street, which also housed the business and sales office. We went there frequently, yard stick in hand, to figure by inches how much furniture we could bring, and ply Robert Laird, the director, with many questions and doubts to be confirmed. Buying an apartment before it was built seemed a rather questionable act. Trips to the complex at Jackson helped some, as we eagerly waited for construction to begin. In October of the next year we were taken by bus to Dayton, Ohio, to see the Village there as guests of Life Care. It was a two day trip, staying at the Holiday Inn, and a good time was had by all.

The first thirty purchasers were entertained at a dinner meeting in the social room of the Pancake House on Drake Road, where we met fellow purchasers and were brought up-to-date on progress. Jim Chase was master of ceremonies and song leader. He accompanied himself on his ukulele and his cow bell. (By the way, have you ever seen or heard Jim's cow bell?)



Pancake House breakfast of first residents before Village construction was complete.

Finally, on February 28, 1975, the first residents—Iva Haver and Jane Fisher—moved in. It was considered unsafe for two lone ladies to stay in an unfinished and unguarded place, so the management sent them to the Holiday Inn at nights. But they soon had neighbors who came as apartments were completed.

At that time the entrance was on the west end of what is now Building 3. A long, wooden plank was the walk. There was no Commons, no kitchen, no dining room, no Health Center. The office was located in apartment 151, where the Allisons now live. Margaret Dutton was bookkeeper. We gathered there at mail time to socialize and look for mail in the temporary mailboxes Sally Loofboro concocted. Chuck Perkins served as head maintenance man with Carl Persons as assistant. The office staff moved in before the residents, and had to wear hard hats because of the construction.

The present library served as our lounge, and easily accommodated the morning coffees when new residents were introduced. Although Fern Ac-Moody's grand piano was in the room, we were not crowded, and sang lustily with Edith Minnis and Mary Shumaker as accompanists.

A memorable occasion in our library-lounge was a surprise celebration honoring our director, Robert Laird, who attained the rank of colonel in the Marines Reserve.

Before the first "moving-in" we had received a newsletter now and then, the first of which was published in May, 1974. This first edition outlined the stages of construction. Included in the 12 statements were these encouraging words:

- The access road has been completed.
- The fire hydrants have been installed.
- The water mains are installed.
- The exterior footings for the Commons building have been poured.
- The Med Center has been staked out preliminary to excavation.
- Occupancy should be expected in 12 months.

The May, 1974 newsletter had a poetry corner, and these verses appeared. Many residents will remember a kindred feeling.

*We've been a sortin'
And throwin' things away,
Till it seems there won't be much
To pack on movin' day.*

It was stated that there would be a contest to name the newsletter paper. On June 7, 1974, there was a social meeting, and suggested titles voted on. "The Villager," submitted by Hazel VanHorn was chosen. She was presented with a gift certificate from Bill Knapp's.

The next issue was April, 1975, and the residents were moving in more rapidly. Can you relate to these lines?

*The cartons stand all over the floor.
I can hardly find my way to the door.
I'd like to sit most anywhere
Isn't there just one available chair?*

The Villager staff then consisted of Eunice LeFevre, Charlotte Doyle, Ruby Willis, William Alwood, Tolly Chase, and Hazel VanHorn.

Residents were looking forward to the day when the Commons would be completed, and thought it was not too far away. Then the State inspectors said the



Groundbreaking—Pulling the dozer!

roof for the Health Center and the kitchen must be higher, so—with another delay and an added expense of \$60,000—we waited.

The arrival of our Aerobus was exciting. Ken, the first driver, named it the Great White Whale, from Moby Dick. We felt proud and privileged as people looked at us curiously and with envy as they read Friendship Village painted on the side. A resident wrote a poem about it, and we sang the words as we rode.

At long last the Commons was completed and the dining room and kitchen staff hired. We were sure it wouldn't be long before meals would be served. But—the kitchen hadn't passed state inspection, and—we waited. So did the staff. The dietician had come, the assistant chef (a rotund individual who looked as though he knew good food). The waiting waitresses made beautiful large menus, as seen in the finest restaurants, and had uniforms that blended with the décor. We looked forward with great anticipation for the day—the opening day—and finally in August, 1975, it came. It was a gala occasion. A ribbon was stretched across the room between the dining area and lounge. The dining room staff, with the dietician and the rotund chef in his white cap stood back of the ribbon, while the residents in their best clothes (ladies in long dresses) watched Iva Haver and Jane Fisher cut the ribbon. With great eagerness, we walked happily into the dining room for a delicious dinner. A-ha, we thought, what a life! The next day the chef resigned—no more delicious dinners—our dream burst! There followed a succession of dieticians, and a succession of complaints, until satisfaction was experienced.

The nurse, who was managing and planning the Med (Health) Center, experienced delays. We had demonstrations of first aid techniques during the waiting period.

There were many “firsts.” In April, 1975,

the first Easter party—about 30 residents were in attendance. In September, 1975 “Villager” we read, “At long last we have found a home for the library in the former coffee lounge at the end of the corridor leading to the dining room.” Alberta Brown's untiring efforts and tenacity finally paid off, and the library has a central location. The Bookmobile's first stop here was in September 1976.

In July, 1975, William and Wretha Alwood celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in our Commons lounge. (It was then called the dining room lounge.) This was the first real special use of the lounge. Jim and Tolly Chase were the first to use the Terrace socially for their 50th!

Another first about this time—an ice cream social. Music was provided by Edith Minnis at the piano and DeWitt Kanouse on the drums.

The first Resident Council had been organized by October, 1975. Elected were Towner Smith, William Alwood, and Mildred McConkey as regulars, and Dorothy Vestal, Marie Shafer, and Margaret Hanna as alternates.

Friendship Circle, a group for Christian fellowship, met for the first time.

The Village Gardeners became affiliated with the Kalamazoo Garden Council.



(L-R) Mr. and Mrs. Jewel, Cody De Vries, Iva Haver and Jane Fisher (at the piano) shown in this early photograph.

There was a very active Sew and Sew group, with Lilas Blakney as chairman. They made lovely dresses for needy children.

Lucy Ramsdell donated a record player to the Health Center.

The first Halloween party took place with costumes.

The first Sunday vespers were held in the Commons lounge on November 9, 1975.

Our beauty parlor, with Ruthford, started in A1 lounge and laundry in May, 1975.

Daisy Williams was the first resident to move into Phase II, in 1976.

Our wonderful Assistance in Living began in 1977.

On October 12, 1975, the official dedication of Friendship Village took place. This was quite an affair. Notables and guests were greeted by organ music by Mary Schumaker. The heretofore muddy courtyard now had grass, flowers, and trees.

John Markillie, President of the Board of Directors, was master of ceremonies. Incidentally, John is credited with the idea of Friendship Village in the first place, as he wanted such a place for his parents. His vision and interest must not be overlooked.

Dr. Berg asked everyone to recite the 23rd Psalm, and we sang "Thanks to God For Dreams of Vision, Goodness and Mercy."

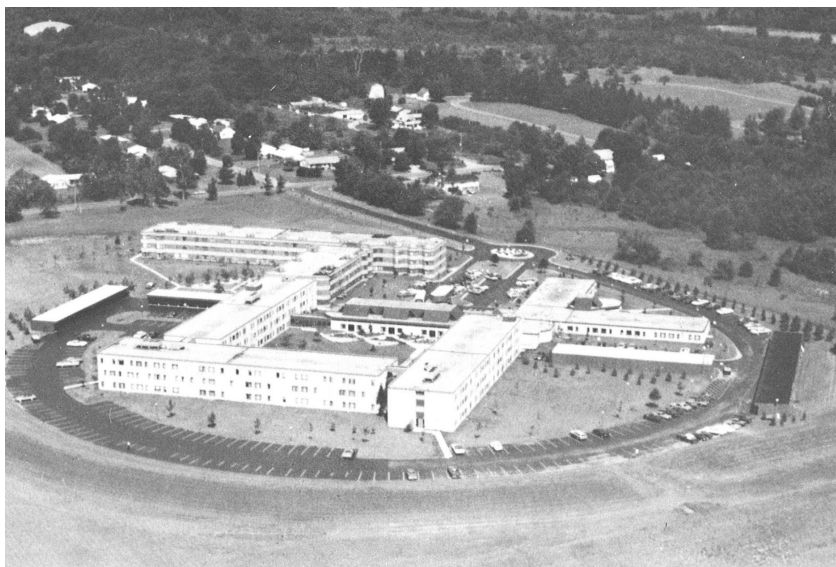
There were social functions in the Commons lounge. Very memorable is one of our earlier events to entertain the Board. It was very nice, with most

of the ladies in formals. There was a champagne fountain (but let it be recorded—punch only served). We had a few candle-light dinners—one with the Jasper Street Players entertaining. Several dress-up functions with dignity and pleasure made life at Friendship Village very pleasant.

Later, in 1976, there was a Christmas play in the Terrace, with the Village choir assisting. Jo Morris, who had just arrived, made beautiful stained glass windows for the background. There were costumes and spotlights—all very impressive.

Robert Laird resigned due to ill health, and we had a part-time director, Jeff Hill. Then came Sister Rose Marie Garvey, who gave us much love and

inspiration for the short time she stayed with us. Larry Moon followed, and now in 1981, is directing the running of this complex, as it has risen to a smooth running facility, where the gnawing doubts as to its success have given way to the comforting feeling of security.



Aerial view of the Village, ca. 1977

It has been interesting, and a little exciting, to experience the building of the Village from the turning of the first shovel of dirt, to a point where it is running like a huge machine—needing oiling once in a while, but still continuing to serve its purpose.

Hazel VanHorn, 1981