



**SENIOR  
CONNECTIONS**

*A program of The Singer Institute*

943 Warder Avenue  
St. Louis, MO 63130  
314.727.9202

*Suzanne Singer, PhD, Founder*

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**“Simple acts of tender mercy  
will eventually tilt the earth  
on its axis and, slowly,  
the world will be changed.”**

—Suzanne Singer, Founder

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## **Year-End Donations Encouraged**

As we approach the end of the year, we are thankful for the hard work of our volunteers and small staff and grateful for your support of Senior Connections. Our fiscal year ends December 31--would you consider making an end of the year donation so we may continue bringing hope and joy to isolated long term care residents and meaningful volunteer opportunities for seniors? Happy Holidays to you! Checks may be made out to The Singer Institute and can be sent to:

The Singer Institute  
943 Warder Ave.  
University City, MO 63130

# THE CONNECTOR



*Pioneering Volunteers and Program Developers Enjoy Social. Pictured Bottom Row: ValDeane Faires, Founder Suzanne Singer, Dr. George A. Benson; Upper Row: Administrator Sandra Roeder Singer and Juanita Svatek.*

## **Senior Connections 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Wine & Cheese Social**

*by Liz Nelson, Singer Institute Board Member*

As the wine was poured, h'ors d'oeuvres were nibbled and jazz melodies were sung by Jeanne Trevor, supporters of The Singer Institute's Senior Connections program gathered at The Brentmoor to celebrate the founder, Dr. Suzanne Singer's, 86th birthday and to acknowledge the dedication of over 100 volunteers. Prof. Nancy Morrow-Howell from the Brown School of Social Work at Washington University delivered the keynote address on the value of "Civic Engagement of Older Adults," illustrated so clearly by the senior "relational volunteers" who are trained to develop ongoing meaningful relationships with elderly long term care facility residents who receive no visitors.

Mistress of Ceremonies Jennifer Blome, Channel 5 news anchor, recognized the pioneering group of Senior Connections volunteers from its inception a decade ago. Blome, who is also a Singer Institute board member and "relational volunteer" herself, noted how these nurturing relationships benefit both the isolated resident and the older adult volunteer who is able to give back to the community. Residents report an improvement in emotional and physical health, while volunteers also acknowledge an improved quality of life from participation.

The 1st Media Award from The Singer Institute was presented to Heidi Glaus, News-

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*Media award given to Heidi Glaus (Newschannel 5)*

## 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Wine and Cheese Social

*continued from page 1*

channel 5 Reporter, for her coverage that recognizes the dignity and service of seniors in the community.

Denise Niemann, Executive Director of The Brentmoor, graciously donated the location and refreshments for the event, with a glorious ice sculpture and cake to acknowledge Suzsanne's birthday. And a donation from Dave Sinclair allowed the Institute to provide the vocal and piano music that was enjoyed by all.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Wine & Cheese Social ended with a wonderful raffle, during which lucky ticket holders won everything from Blues tickets to a stay in the Beale Mansion to a Build-a-Bear bear and gift certificate. Best of all, all proceeds went directly to support the Senior Connections program. To learn more about the program and the Singer Institute, make a donation, or volunteer, please visit [www.singerinstitute.org](http://www.singerinstitute.org) or call 314-727-9202



*Mistress of Ceremonies, Jennifer Blome*

# Give and You Shall Receive

*by Roberta Kilstrom, Volunteer*

"Give and you shall receive. . ." That was my experience for seven months with a seventy-eight-year-old nursing home resident I visited through Senior Connections.

Vera was a bright, out-going woman whose loneliness had much to do with physical limitations and significant losses, as is true of many nursing home residents. She had lived at the home for three years and told me stories about her former life without any prodding. We had long, happy marriages and widowhood in common, as well as a love of dogs, books, small children, and humor. Aware of how little control nursing home residents have, I encouraged her to tell me when she didn't feel like visiting, and she would.

Photos of aides' children and nurses covered her wall along with those of her family and my grandson. She loved hearing stories about him and telling me of her children and grandchildren. Storytelling is a significant way seniors find meaning in the past and bring closure to it.

She had long been a reader, and I tried reviving that interest but she had trouble concentrating for long. However, she turned me on to Barbara Walters' memoir *Audition* when it first came out, and we enjoyed the many photos in it together. Short *NT Times* articles, funny poems, and updates on the sled dog race in Alaska held her interest. And she enjoyed mail, so I sent cards and notes, particularly when I was out of town.

Conversation was what she enjoyed more than anything else, and she was a listener as much as she was a talker. I loved being company and having hers. There was almost always laughter. When her hair was cut short and I commented on it, she told me she wanted to be "a clone of me."

She would share her fears and losses by telling me old stories or her dreams. I am not a good housekeeper, so I was amazed that she would dream of cleaning the house she shared with her husband. On her wedding anniversary, she dreamed of her husband and let me know she really wanted to see him again, adding, "But I still love life."

As her health worsened, she would sometimes wake up in the middle of the night, afraid of not being able to get enough oxygen—"what would happen if no one came soon enough to help her?!" We talked about not scaring herself, about staying in the present. Then she would say, in her typical humorous way, "I know what would help, Roberta; you come here four times a week."

Then one morning I arrived at the home to find that her room was being cleaned out. Greatly alarmed, I asked the workers if Vera had died. She had been in the hospital for some time. Luckily I had the phone number of one of her relatives, so I was able to find out how things were going for her. Privacy laws and the strict way in which they are interpreted, often don't allow information to be passed from homes to volunteers. Thankfully, her relatives notified me of her death and her funeral, which I attended along with three of her friends from the nursing home. We have become friends too, which eased Vera's loss for us all.

For some time, however, I was aware of more sadness than I was expecting until I realized how old grief over the loss of my own family members had surfaced with her passing. I was also aware of how grateful I was for Vera's laughter, listening, and sharing over those seven months. I find this work a most satisfying and personal kind of volunteering where giving and receiving are both rewards, and I am now visiting another resident.

# Senior Connections Dogs Had Their Day...In Church!

*By Leslie Bisset*

Senior Connections' volunteers and their dogs were special guests at the monthly Paws and Prayers Service at Family of Christ Fellowship Church in St. Peters, MO, on Sunday, July 4th. On the first Sunday of each month, the church has a special service where pet lovers can bring their dogs. They work in partnership with the St. Charles Humane Society and Volunteer Coordinator Mandy Pratt who brought Rummy—a beautiful cat (they are welcome, too!).

Four Senior Connections' volunteers and their dogs were present and included Suzsanne Singer, Sandy Singer and Oreo; Mary Lu Thurman and Millie; Florence and Ken Pan-kiewicz and Lollipop; and Lesley Bissett and Rosie. Pastor Justin Anderson acknowledged the visitors and each dog enjoyed the cube of cheese passed out to them in the offering plate. The joy these animals bring to residents of nursing homes is exceptional, and results in many calls of delight and smiles from the people they visit. It is hoped that more volunteers will consider bringing their special pet to nursing homes. For further information and guidelines, contact Sandy Singer at (314) 727-9202 or e-mail Senior Connections at singerinstitute@yahoo.com.

For further information about the Paws and Prayers Service, call Family of Christ Fellowship Church (a non-denominational Christian Church) at (636) 922-5609



*St. Peters Manor Care Center resident  
Jessie loves spending time with her  
volunteer's dog, Rosie*

## Build-A-Bear Connection

If you ever had a special teddy bear friend, then you will know how the seniors we serve will treasure their gift from Build-A-Bear Workshop.® And just imagine the joy our Relational Volunteers will receive from presenting a stuffed animal to the Senior Connection friend they visit.

Senior Connections is very grateful to Build-A-Bear Workshop for their generous contribution of enough bears so each senior we serve will have a furry friend nearby, when no one else is around to visit. The bears will be presented during the holiday season.

Anyone who has visited a nursing home or long term care facility has seen firsthand the numbers of residents sitting in wait for their journey home. It's hard to imagine just how lonely the wait can be without visitors. They hope for and sincerely appreciate the love our Volunteers bring. Just imagine their joy as their spirits soar to new heights when they receive their very own teddy bear to comfort them.

And, we encourage all of our friends to take a child, grand and great grandchild, and seniors too, to a Build-A-Bear Workshop to create a lasting memory of true joy.

### In Memoriam

We are deeply saddened by the recent death of long time volunteer and supporter Mrs. William S. (Anita) Cassilly, whose love and concern surrounded us for several decades. Her recent donations through The Greater St. Louis Community Foundation made a wonderful difference in maintaining and expanding Senior Connections.

## Raffle Prize Donation Thank You's to:

A. Bommarito Wines  
Robert Bry  
Build-A-Bear  
Carol House Furniture  
Continuum  
Steve Clayton Hair Design  
Dierbergs Market  
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Dr. Aamir and Susan Salaria  
Schlafly Brewery  
Schnucks  
Stranded No More  
Straubs  
Trader Joe's  
Travel the World  
Waterway  
Harold Williams



# SENIOR CONNECTIONS

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**www.singerinstitute.org**

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Executive Director, The Singer Institute



*Senior Connections volunteer, David Overall, is recognized by Bethesda Meadows for the joy he brings the resident he visits.*

## Relational Volunteer David Overall Honored

Senior Connections is pleased to announce that David Overall, board member & relational volunteer, was honored by Bethesda Meadows at its Bethesda Volunteer Luncheon. Overall was presented an award for being an outstanding relational volunteer.

## Upcoming Training

The next relational volunteer training for the Good Neighbor Course is being offered by Senior Connections Saturdays, November 13th & 20th, 9am-1pm at the Warder House, 943 Warder Ave., University City, MO 63130. For More information please call (314) 727-9202.