

CITY SUBURBAN NEWS

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Mazel tov

CELEBRATING JEWISH CULTURE & COMMUNITY

The Pen is Mightier than the Sword at Martins Run

Members of the Martins Run Writing Group let their literary skills shine

Residents of Martins Run, a senior living community in Media, PA, are turning to the notepad as a form of self-expression and a means of re-visiting their memories past. Formed three years ago, the Martins Run Writing Group, which consists of six "regulars," thrives as a favorite interest group at the community. Led by Janet Falon, a self-employed writer and writing teacher, the group meets once a month on Tuesday afternoons.

While all of the group members share a passion for writing, each resident has a unique purpose and motivation for joining the group. One resident, desiring to write a book about her life, attended the monthly sessions long enough to get feedback from group members and finish her memoir. Another resident wrote a love letter as a way of expressing his sorrow about missing his wife. Janet has learned not to tiptoe around sensitive subjects, as group members seem eager to share even their most personal experiences with others. "There is a sadness to some of their stories, but they are so lovely at the same time," said Janet.

A typical session begins with residents volunteering to read their work aloud, as Janet and the rest of the group listen. More often than not residents share what they have written over the past month, but are encouraged to share pieces they wrote many years ago, too. Following the reading, Janet leads a discussion in which the group gives their feedback on the piece. Occasionally Janet brings in examples of writing she likes and engages the group in a roundtable discussion – an activity the group tends to enjoy.

"My goal is not to turn them into fabulous writers. It's for them to have a good time, enjoy the process of self-expression, and to connect with me and others. More than anything else, this class gives residents an outlet for sharing terrific stories and allows them to write narrative pieces to pass on to their descendants," said Janet. "It's not just about me being a teacher. It's a group experience."

Members of the group share a love of writing, but the range of experience is broad. Some have been writing all their lives, while others took it up as hobby after moving to Martins Run. None of the members, however, are professional writers.

When it comes to thinking of topics to write about, Janet says that she has a "fountain of ideas—one that will never go dry." She tries to pick the one that fits at the time, but the group mostly writes about their past and their present. "The writing spurs discussions on everyone's memories of a particular topic. It creates a sort of group cohesion, which is really nice," said Janet.

She points out that it is not always what they are writing about, but also how they are writing about it, that gives character to the Martins Run Writing Group. "Members have their own idiosyncrasies and their own voices that really add flavor to their writing and to the group itself," said Janet.



Vicki Conner (left), Arts and Entertainment Manager at Martins Run, accompanies Sadie Hofstein (right), President of the Residents Association at Martins Run, at the podium as she recites a poem she wrote for the Grand Opening Celebration for the new library, which was held on March 17 at Martins Run.

Some members of the group have found ways to apply their writing expertise outside of class. Harry Sosson, a dedicated member of the Martins Run Writing Group, took the initiative of putting together a small anthology of literary pieces written by fellow residents. Other members have sent articles and letters to be published in local publications.

The group's most recent assignment was to write a poem about books, libraries or reading in general. As a brainstorming exercise, the residents formulated several lists, including their favorite childhood books, characters they would want to be, and books they will never get to read. Ultimately, many of the poems detailed the residents' excitement toward Martins Run's new library. The residents had the opportunity to read their poems at the grand opening for the renovated library.

Martins Run is a not-for-profit, senior living community located in Marple Township, Delaware County, a suburb of Philadelphia. Martins Run is dedicated to offering residents a wide variety of recreational and lifelong learning opportunities, including Martins Run University, a series of on-site lectures designed to inspire seniors to embrace continued education. For info, visit www.martinsrun.org.