

# Senior housing almost like a college dorm

**'This is their time,' says Twin Towers development official.**

By Mary McCarty  
Staff Writer

When you meet Joanne Gregory and Delores Keller, you would guess they have been friends for life.

After all, both grew up in Depression-era Catholic families in East Dayton; they graduated from Julianne High School two years apart (Keller in 1945, Gregory in 1947).

Yet they met only two years ago, when the gregarious Gregory took the quieter Keller under her wing when she moved into Twin Towers Place, one of six senior apartment complexes operated by St. Mary Development Corporation.

"I knew no one," Keller recalled. "Joanne helped to bring me out of myself."

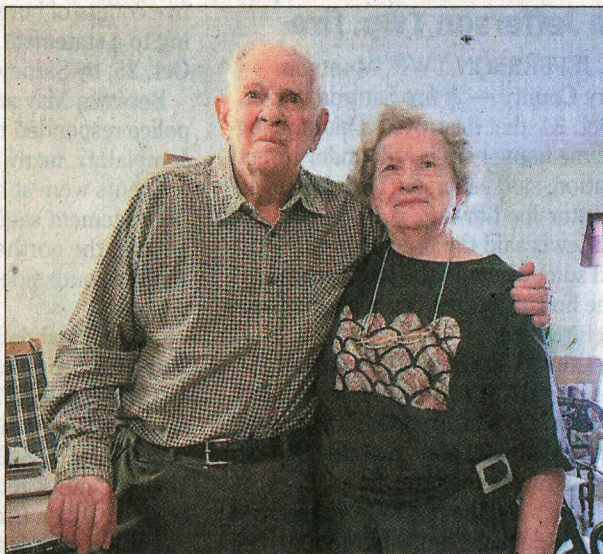
"She looks out for me," Gregory said.

The inseparable friends admit they're opposites.

"That's why we get along so well," Keller said.

There's something strangely familiar about all of this — the instantaneous friendships, the communal couches, the monthly calendars packed with activities and exercise classes. If you take out the ages of the residents, Twin Towers Place — which recently reopened after a \$9 million renovation — reminds you of a really deluxe college dormitory.

"Many of our residents



**Bill, 92, and Jean Grizzell, 85, have been married 62 years and now live at Twin Towers.** Staff photo by Jim Noelker

never had the chance to go to college," said Sister Rose Wildenhaus, co-founder of St. Mary Development Corp. which is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. "This is their time."

Eileen Schumacher, 72, went to grade school at St. Mary's — the long-closed Catholic school that is now the site of Twin Towers Place.

"We love it and we love having such a beautiful place to come to in our old age," she said.

"This gives us our independence, to do what we want to do and go where we want to go." Joyce Beaty, 81, said.

Granted, there are Bingo games instead of beer blasts, jaunts to Grand Victoria Casino instead of career fairs. Resident satisfaction at St. Mary properties ranks considerably

higher than a typical college dorm as well, with a recent survey showing 65.2 percent as "very satisfied" and 29.3 percent as "satisfied."

Yet there's a sense here that life is far from over, that the last chapters can be as significant as the first.

"Lonely? Who has time to be lonely?" asked 85-year-old Jean Grizzell, who lives at Twin Towers with her 92-year-old husband, Bill. "If I do, I knock on someone's door and say 'Hey, why don't you come over for a cup of coffee?'"

Jean misses "being able to get in my yard and dig in the dirt," but she has flower pots on her balcony, and she converted a small second bedroom into a sewing room.

"It's home," she said.

Best of all, she has the

companionship of her husband of 62 years.

"We were married 25 years before we ever had a dispute," Bill declares proudly.

What was it about? "We're not telling," Jean replies.

She does share one secret for a happy marriage: "We always were able to talk it out without getting angry. We were raised the same way and in the same Baptist faith, and that's very important."

The Grizzells share a similar story about how they found Twin Towers: "Our children are the ones who found it. Our neighborhood didn't feel safe any more, and Bill had broken his hip. We have very nice children."

After he suffered a heart attack, 62-year-old Richard Welch's daughter begged him, "Daddy, get rid of that big old house."

It's reassuring for adult children to know their parents are living in a safe, comfortable apartment at one of the senior apartment complexes where rents range from \$480 to \$510 a month. (A benevolent fund is available for couples who can no longer afford the rent.) "We absolutely will not kick anyone out," said co-founder Dick McBride.

Emotional needs are as important as the physical. Jerry Share, 86, likes not having to shovel snow and keep up his property. Most of all, he enjoys the companionship of other residents after losing his wife

of 58 years, Betty.

"It is lonely without her," he said, "But I can't comprehend how I'd handle it if I were alone."

St. Mary Development has made great strides since the days when McBride and Wildenhaus did absolutely everything. One day, a resident pointed to him, exclaiming, "Hey, you look just like the guy who mows the grass!"

McBride no longer pushes the lawn mower, but the agency has remained true to its founding principles. At an anniversary luncheon earlier in the summer, U.S. Rep. Mike Turner, a long-time supporter, praised the co-founders for remaining true to their dream. Before her death in 2001, his grandmother, Bessie Shouse, lived at Huffman Place, on the very site of the old Huffman School where her son had attended grade school.

"Dick and Sister Rose, you look the same, but as a result of your hard work, our community will never look the same," said Turner, R-Centerville. "You have learned about a more holistic view of how to change lives. You can't just go and rehab a house, you have to look at the needs of family, from Head Start classes to credit counseling. You can't just build a building, you have to build a home."

That they have done — some 2,400 homes, to be precise.

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