

Local Spotlight on Character, Community, and Friendship... And the Chartley woman who personifies all three.

Today's spotlight is on a long-term resident of our community.

Many of you in the Chartley community know her by name. Those of you who are civic-minded have probably served on at least one volunteer committee with her at some point over the years. You would have been most likely to do this with ROG, or the PTA, or the Women's Club of Glyndon, or the League of Women Voters. Or perhaps you, too, did AFS years ago, when she was involved with the program, and hosted students during the summers. Or, she might have been on the scholarship committee that helped you to realize your dreams by helping you to pay for college. You might remember her from summers spent at the Glyndon pool, or seen her at the Tennis Club.

You might have played bridge with her at some point, because she is a woman who loves to play bridge with her friends.

If you love the ocean as much as she does, you might very well have run into her on the beach in Fenwick Island. She's been going there since she was a child. She feels a spiritual connection with ocean, and Fenwick is where she goes to renew and recharge. She doesn't play beach volleyball with laughter and abandon like she used to, but you might have shared a wave with her this summer, because she still does like to body surf. Or perhaps have spend a peaceful afternoon sitting in a beach chair beside her, talking about life, and watching the waves roll in, and the parade of people and sandpipers go by.

Some of you only know her at Halloween, when she puts on her costume and becomes the wonderful witch of Janet Road. You could not mistake her: she's the one in full witchy attire, with a pointed witches hat, and a talking crow on her arm. The kids come in droves to see her every Halloween. They come in van loads, too, but she doesn't mind. This witch won't hand out any candy, though, not until each and every trick-or-treater pays her fee. And what is this fee? Why, her candy can be had for a song. Quite literally. You must sing her a song. Any song will do, she is not particular about it. You can offer up the Alphabet Song, or sing a duet of Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star with your friend for all she cares. Or your whole gang can belt out a Christmas carol together, if you like. That always seems to be a popular choice, for some reason. It doesn't matter what you choose, so long as you lift up your voice in song.

Others of you might know her by her bright smile and infectious laugh, or the way her eyes sparkle when she tells a story. If you are the one telling the story, you might recognize her for the way she really seems to listen to what you have to say. You might know her by the colorful and stylish clothing she favors, or the way she lights up any room just by walking into it. You might know her as the lady who sings along to the music they play in the grocery store aisle. If you're lucky, you might have seen her jitterbug: when she and her husband get going, they can really cut the rug!

Or you might catch her in a quiet moment, standing still in her kitchen widow, watching the sun as it sets, or the leaves changing color, or the snow as it silently falls. She might surprise you, and run outside to catch some of the flakes on her tongue if its the first snow fall of the season. It won't matter if you are watching; she will do it anyway.

If you love Santa Claus and Christmas lights, and if the Holiday Spirit fills you with as much joy as it does this lady and her friends, then you have probably driven very slowly down Janet Road in December in order to admire all the beautifully decorated homes there. You've probably paused in front of her house to admire the lights and the holiday scene. Perhaps you've even been invited in to see her collection of Santa Clauses - I think she has nearly 100 of them now. There are all different kinds of Santa figures around the house, but the thing that they all have in common is that each one looks patient and kind.

If you like to take walks through the streets and byways of Chartley, you've probably seen this gal tending to her flower beds, or pruning her roses. Or found her just sitting on the bench there in the yard, reading a book as she listens to the fountain murmur and watches the birds. Maybe you have paused on your walk to

share some pleasant conversation about the events of the day. You might have worshipped with her at All Saints Episcopal Church, especially when Fred Hanna was the pastor there. You might know her best as Denee's Mom, and their house might have been a second home to you while you were growing up. Or perhaps you know her as Zan's Grammy, or Alex's wife.

Many, many, many of you may have some story to tell of something special that this lady has said or done for you over the last 40 years. During the course of those years, she has remained a vital member of this community, and she has made an indelible impression on many of her fellow residents. A good number of you might know that she is smart and funny and wise and loving. Many of you have remarked that she is so joyfully full of life and wonder and energy. Even more will tell you that she is also one determined lady.

If you know her well, you might have noticed that she has taken to wearing funky hats this summer. Or perhaps you happened to see her out and about one day, and came upon her without any hat on her head at all, her fuzzy stubbly head bravely bared. Her sudden baldness might have startled you, or caught you by surprise. Your surprise might have made you look away at first, in awkward discomfort, only to turn your gaze back again a moment later, meeting her eyes with compassion and sympathy.

This lady tells me that she has learned many things this summer, and one of those things is that people are very kind to bald women. I want you to know that she has been warmed and lifted by your kindnesses, and I thank you for that. Even so, I suspect that there are a whole lot of folks who don't know that this beloved member of our community has been fighting uterine cancer since the spring. And you may also not know that lately, the fight has not been going as well as she would like, or have hoped.

My name is Kim. Many of you might know my Mom. Her name is Phyllis Daly, and this is her story.

Sometimes, a person and a place are so well suited to each other that they become almost synonymous in our minds. The two so closely reflect each other's nature that it becomes difficult to think of one without also then thinking of the other. Like Thoreau and Walden, Seinfeld and New York, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Seneca Falls, and Laura Ingalls Wilder and Walnut Grove. Or Santa Claus and the North Pole, for instance.

Closer to home, we have Phyllis Daly and Chartley. It is not surprising to find that the woman herself and the community that she has so loved and served for nearly forty years embody many of the same essential characteristics. Or that they both inspire such enthusiasm, nostalgia, and warm regard in so many of the area residents.

Over the years, many people have come to know Phyllis because of all the volunteer work she has done with various organizations. Phyllis feels strongly that it important to give back to the community. She feels that citizen apathy is the biggest danger that any community faces. For a community to remain strong and vital, the citizens of that community must actively participate in guiding it and sustaining it, she asserts.

"People can accomplish a lot when they work together toward a common goal," says Phyllis.

Phyllis Daly has a long history of community activism that certainly bears witness to the veracity of that statement. She is also something of a character, in all the best senses of the word. It is a reflection of her essential nature, which is marked by moral excellence and firmness, which is how my dictionary defines character, and an acknowledgement that she is also known and loved for having certain notable and conspicuous traits.

Daly has been active in a variety of community groups over the years. One of the first groups that she joined was the League of Women Voters, where she was chairwoman on a variety of committees, and eventually served as a County Board member. Phyllis particularly appreciates the bi-partisan approach that the League employs in addressing the key issues pertinent to the community. This allows any woman to become involved in the issues effecting her community. It is about people coming together to serve the common good, and affords each member an equal voice in that dialogue.

"The League members identify which issues they want to address for the community, and then assign a small group to study each issue," she explains. "Once those assigned members have gotten together the facts and information, they discuss it as a group," Phyllis reports. "When the study group feels they have a complete understanding of the issue, they report it to the entire membership. The whole membership then discusses it. We have had the most wonderful debates!" she relates. "After everyone has a chance to examine the issue, we all vote on it. That then becomes the formal position for the chapter. We then represent that position for the League to the local League at the County, State, or Federal levels, depending on the issue. The League then lobbies at those levels with other groups and agencies to promote the needs and concerns of our community."

Gina McManus remembers talking with Phyllis after one of those discussion-filled meetings.

"The meeting was basically a debate of both side of the issue, then a process of bringing the attendees to consensus so the Chapter would have a position. Phyllis was always thoughtful and articulate," Gina recalls. "On the way out of one meeting, Phyllis remarked that she didn't know if she was broadminded, or if she was wishy-washy, as she could see merit to both sides of an issue."

"Those of you who know Phyllis clearly know that she is not wishy-washy," McManus emphasizes.

During the late 70's and early 80's, Phyllis was as a member of the Republican Central Committee. Daly also served as a successful Campaign Chairperson for State Delegate Bert Booth.

Phyllis was involved with other organizations as well. She was very active in the PTA while her daughters were in school, and served as PTA President for a time. During that time, the primary concerns were encouraging very active parental participation in the schooling, and keeping class sizes low to ensure a good environment for quality education to take place. "And fund raising. That's always a PTA President's biggest job, whether they want to admit it or not," Daly asserts.

Toward that end, Phyllis is very proud of the work she did with the memorable Reisterstown Elementary School Balloon Ascension Fundraisers.

"It was a huge event, and everyone participated. We released 12,000 balloons into the sky, all at one time. It was an amazing spectacle. Then, for the 1976 ascension, all the kids dressed up in revolutionary war costumes to celebrate the bicentennial. Each balloon that we sold had a card on it with the donors name and address, and people would mail the cards back and tell us where they had landed. One little boy got a card back that said his balloon had flown all the way to New England." Phyllis says with enthusiasm, then looks chagrined. "Of course, we don't do that fundraiser anymore. We didn't know then about the negative environmental impact the balloons might have."

One of the most significant community contributions that Phyllis has made to date took place during her time with ROG, the Reisterstown Owings Mills Glyndon Coordinating Counsel. One of the first items of business that then-new organization decided to tackle was making the long-proposed Northwest Expressway a reality. In 1977, Claire Bosley, founding member and first President of the group, tapped Phyllis Daly to lead the charge.

The Northwest Expressway had been languishing for over 30 years. With little support at the state or federal levels, and with zero funding, it seemed doomed to remain nothing more than a dotted line on the land use planning maps. Construction of this Expressway, I-795, would greatly improve commuter travel. More importantly, it would relieve a great deal of the tremendous pressure on the overburdened Reisterstown Road, and restore Main Street's status as a community thoroughfare, rather than a commuter bottle neck.

At the time, Reisterstown Road was consistently listed as one of the ten most dangerous stretch of road in the state because of the impossible traffic burden it was forced to carry as the only artery serving that corridor. A federal highway funding initiative was about to expire, and it had just enough funds remaining in it's allocation budget to cover the bulk of the proposed highway. If ROG could secure those funds, the State would be likely to come up with the balance. The project had been hopeless stalled for over 30 years.

Claire Bosley thought if anyone could do it, it would be Phyllis. So she asked Phyllis to head the committee for getting the Expressway through.

Everyone told her that it couldn't be done. And I do mean everyone.

Her husband Alex cautioned her not to get her hopes up. He says it was because he n want her to feel disappointed. In an early meeting on the matter, a planner in the State Department of Transportation said that he gave the committee no more than a 10% chance of success. Luckily, Phyllis didn't realize that she was attempting to do the impossible.

It's a good thing that she didn't listen to those nay-sayers. Because as it turns out, everyone else was wrong about it being an impossible task.

The ROG Expressway committee never really considered the possibility of failure. They felt that theirs was a just cause, and a reasonable one, and they felt that the timing was finally right. They were enthusiastic, and confident that they would prevail.

Under Phyllis's determined and inspired leadership, the impossible suddenly became possible after all. After more than a solid year of tireless effort, hundreds of phone calls and letters, and many meetings with all sorts of state and federal officials, the committee succeeded in getting the project approved, and funded. The Northwest Expressway was completed efficiently and on time, and finally opened to traffic in 1985. It is noteworthy to mention that I-795 was intentionally constructed with space for a commuter rail line to run in the median, another commuter boon that was completed soon after.

"There was a moment, when I finally had a sense of how big an undertaking this was," she admits. "It was when all those state and federal people that I had been talking to on the phone came to the first meeting, which was in the basement of our home. I was a bit surprised that they all actually showed up."

"Most people don't realize it, but they should send up a little nod of thanks to my Mom every time they travel up and down I-795, especially during rush hour," says Phyllis's daughter Kim. "Do you remember how awful and crowded and scary Reisterstown Road used to be, especially during peak hours? Well, Mom played a crucial role in making the Northwest Expressway a reality. She believed it was the right thing to do for the entire region. And because she believed, she got everyone else to believe, too. She was fearless and she was determined. All the way up the line, in every agency, people got on board."

Phyllis demurs from taking the credit, however.

"The stars were in alignment; it was perfect timing," she claims. "A lot of different people were willing to meet with us, and once everyone came together, we were finally able to make some progress. Everyone involved did their part to bring it to fruition. Everything just coalesced, and the pieces all fell into place."

She also credit former Senator Charles "Mac" Mathias for carrying the issue to the federal level, and leading the effort to secure the last of the federal highway grant money that ultimately made the project possible.

This is some thing that Phyllis cares deeply about, and she warms to her subject. "It really was a wonderful example of people from all kinds of different groups and factions all working in cooperation with each other. People have forgotten what they can accomplish when everyone stands up together to achieve the same goal. People have stopped believing that they can make things happen. We have allowed the government to direct us, instead of remembering that it is us who directs the government."

"Phyllis has a way of getting people to all come together, and do great things as a result," says her husband Alex. "She has always had that ability, as long as I have known her. She really cares about people, and always wants to get involved in helping to make things better. And whenever she'd get involved, she would usually end up in a leadership role. People seem to recognize how gifted she is, and they just naturally respond to her ideas and enthusiasm."

Gina McManus voices similar sentiments about Daly's skill at mediation and persuasion.

"She is perceptive, thoughtful, and not hesitant to articulate her opinion." McManus attests. "Phyllis perceives the essence of an issue quickly and argues cogently, but she never denigrates the opposition. Everyone who deals with Phyllis always comes away with not only respect, but genuine affection for her. Our community and quality of life are better for all of Phyllis's efforts."

"Phyllis is amazing!" affirms Kathy Shay, current President of the Women's Club of Glyndon. "She sits back and assesses the situation, then always seems to come up with just the perfect suggestion to solve the issue. She is very thoughtful, and caring, and down to earth. For the last three years, Phyllis has spearheaded our big Fashion Show fundraiser. She has been a superior leader, and is truly loved by all in the club."

Susie Moore, close friend of Phyllis and fellow community activist concurs.

"When I look back over the some 40 years that I've known Phyllis, I realize that she is one of the most passionate people I've ever known. She is someone who will commit to an issue and not give up until it's resolved. She is always willing to extend a hand to help." says Ms. Moore.

"I always think: **W**hat **W**ould **P**hyllis **D**o when an issue comes up that I might be on the fence about," reports Carolyn Eichler. Ms. Eichler is a board of the Women's Club of Gyndon, and served with Phyllis years ago on ROG. "Phyllis's instincts have always been spot-on, even when I was not as brave as she was in expressing those opinions. I learned from Phyllis that it was okay to disagree with people and not get angry, but rather just work together toward a common goal."

Phyllis went on to serve as the president of ROG from 1979-1981. A key initiative then was a Revitalization Program for Reisterstown. The ROG council, in conjunction with the Chamber of Commerce, produced a 25 page booklet at that time as the result of a study that they commissioned. Revitalization of the community and of Main Street, as well as directed and intentional growth remain key issues for the community today, Phyllis believes, as are managing the impact of that growth on the roads and school and the area's infrastructure.

"Right now, though, the biggest issue facing the Chartley Community, and the nation as whole, is of course the economy," observes Phyllis.

Phyllis continues to be involved in the community civic organizations, not only with the Glyndon Women's Club, as noted above, but also serving as chairwoman of the CHA Joseph S. Molinaro Memorial Scholarship for the last several years. Phyllis says she has especially enjoyed serving on the scholarship committee, because she has really been inspired by the passion and enthusiasm of the young applicants.

"I love meeting these talented neighborhood kids, and the wonderful variety they have in terms of perspectives and ideas. Some of their goals and dreams are really inspiring," Phyllis says. "I love that we can do something for them, to help them pursue those dreams."

As much time and energy as Phyllis has contributed to the community, however, she always felt that her main responsibility was providing a warm and loving home, and raising fruitful children.

"I have always been very proud of Phyllis," confirms her husband, Alex. "I probably didn't say that as much as I should have. And I always admired that with everything else that she did, she still always took care of things at home, and was there for the family. That's always where her heart is."

Daughter Denee agrees. "Growing up, I always knew that Mom was very involved with important community activities, like the PTA and ROG. But I don't remember it ever interfering with our family life. She was still always there for us as a family, as a Mom. She somehow was still able to spend lots of time with us, and was always around to talk or play football or throw the Frisbee."

“She made our house a wonderful place to come home to, not just for me, but for many of my friends, too.” Denee recalls. “Mom did all the things that made childhood warm and rich and fun, and she gave my sister Kim and I a wonderful foundation that allowed us to explore and grow, and find our own way.”

“Now that I have grown up, and have a son of my own, I have a better perspective on how much care and effort Mom put into taking care of us,” Denee continues. “Mom showed the same care and concern and dedication to everyone in our circle of families. And now I realize that Mom, by being aware, and informed, and involved in the civic concerns of the community, that she was taking care of the whole community in the same way she always took care of all of us.”

If you ask Phyllis what it is that she likes most about Chartley, you can watch her eyes light up when she talks about her community.

"Chartley was and is a wonderful place to be a family," Phyllis says earnestly. "When we were looking for a home in the early 70's, Chartley was the perfect place to settle down and raise a family. Now, many of the kids that grew up here are moving back for all of the same reasons. Nice homes, solid values, good schools, and a sense of community."

“When we first pulled up to look at the house, all of the kids were outside playing together. What really made an impression, tho, was that the adults were outside, too, talking and laughing and visiting with each other. That resonated with me. Alex and I were looking for a community like that. You still find that here, and that is one of the things I especially love about Chartley.”

Phyllis grew up in Delaware, first in a tight-knit Polish neighborhood in Wilmington’s South Bridge area, then the family moved to a farm outside of Newark when she was nine. She attended Newark High school, where she was a popular and well-liked student. Phyllis attended the University of Delaware, where she met and married Alex Daly. She graduated with a degree in English with an intention of someday teaching. Alex got his degree in business and took a job with Black and Decker, a company in remained with until his retirement. The young couple moved to Academy Avenue in Ownings Mills.

The young family moved to Reisterstown in 1970. Phyllis, along with her husband Alex, began looking for a home in which to raise their two young daughters, Kim, then aged 7, and Denee, then a 6-month old infant. Phyllis was a full-time Mom. Alex was back and forth between offices in Hampstead and Towson. They chose Reisterstown for it's convenient location and good school system, but they chose Chartley for its character, and its friendliness, and the sense of welcome.

The young couple made quite an impression themselves, reports next door neighbor Chris Kiesewetter.

"When they moved in, they pulled up to the house on a motorcycle, if you can imagine that!" she remembers, laughing. "We didn't know what to expect."

Barbara Hardesty, who lived across the street from Phyllis for many years shares similar memories of the Daly family's arrival.

"Not only did Phyllis and Alex arrive on a motorcycle, they also immediately knocked a hole in the foundation, and put in a brick fireplace. Nobody else was doing anything like that then. And if that weren't unusual enough, two days after they moved in, they left on vacation! Just moved in, put in a fireplace, then two days later up and took off to the beach for two weeks! Whoever heard of such a thing?" Barbara exclaims, still able to clearly picture the sudden flurry of activity. "I had no way of knowing then that Phyllis would become one of my closest friends, or that our special friendship would endure for almost 40 years."

"We made some wonderful friends here, we have been blessed with an amazing circle of friends as a result of moving to Chartley," Phyllis says. "It started out with just being good neighbors. Then it expanded to a bridge club, and babysitting for each other, and multi-family barbecues, summers days at the Glyndon Pool,

sledding parties in the winter, and a big Memorial Day picnic every year."

"There was a whole group of us that were all at the same place in our lives, raising family and very interested in learning and growing ourselves," relates Barbara Hardesty. "It was a wonderful thing to share that time of our lives with each other, and to find that kind of encouragement and acceptance. We basically raised our children together as an extended family circle, and we shared each others lives, the good times as well as the bad."

"There are so many wonderful memories from those years," remembers Chris Kiesewetter. "We loved to get together for backyard picnics when the kids were growing up, and they always included very heated volleyball games. One of my fondest memories is when Gerry lost her wig during one of those games."

"And at the Glyndon pool, during adult swims we all used to play a game where we stood in a big circle and tried to keep a ball in the air as long as possible. There was always a lot of laughter when we all got together," she recalls, smiling. "Then in the winter, the county would not come and clear our street for days, because our road is so small. So all the neighbors would get together and dig each other out. Phyllis was always one of the first ones to come out to shovel. We had a lot of fun in the snow after the kids went to bed, too. The grown ups would go sledding on the hill behind our house, then warm up with some Irish coffee after the fun."

Phyllis remembers those years as a sort of 'age of innocence' for their children, too.

"I loved that there was an army of kids, and that we could watch you run out the door in the morning to go play with your friends, and not worry for you because we knew that there would always be at least one Mommy in a window watching over you. If one of the kids fell, or skinned a knee, or needed anything at all, a mom was right there, no matter if the kid was hers or not," Phyllis relates. "That sense of safety and care and belonging was a wonderful gift for the kids and the moms alike."

"All the kids felt like they had all the parents looking out for them," agrees Phyllis's daughter Denece. "Growing up, you all knew that you had a lot of people who loved you. You knew that they were there for you, even if you messed up. Not just the Moms, but the Dads were really supportive and caring, too. Having so many people that cared about you provided a really solid sense of self worth and a positive image of ourselves, beyond the automatic support of our immediate families."

"Chartley has always been a good place to come home to," husband Alex agrees, summing up their sentiments.

Over the years, those friendships have grown into the deeply shared connection that the families still maintain today.

"I have lived in Georgia now for longer than I lived in Chartley," relates Barbara Hardesty "Yet I have never found another friendship like the ones I still have with Phyllis and other members of that group of families. We raised our children together, and we shared so many of life's experiences; you just can replace the depth and meaningfulness of those shared bonds."

"We did raise our children together, and we have celebrated life's joyous occasions with each other. There have also been challenges and disappointments, and we all supported each other and weathered them together." says Phyllis.

"The weekly bridge club is still getting together after all these years," Chris Kiesewetter marvels. "It has been a great support group for all of us."

"We are bound together by a rich kaleidoscope of shared experiences, and multi-colored memories of joys and sorrows, and quiet contentment," Phyllis observed sagely.

Other women reflect the same depth of feeling about the group's enduring connection.

"We are all very different, but we love each other in spite of those differences. And we depend on each other for moral support," explains Barbara Hayman, another member of the circle of friends. "We know we can share anything, and we won't be judged. When someone in the bridge club has a problem, no matter what it is, we just want to know how we can help."

"Phyllis in particular always accepted me for who I was," says Barbara Hardesty, who has since moved to Georgia with her family. "You could tell Phyllis anything, and she never criticized, never judged, never gossiped. She will just listen, and be there for you. And she has such a joy for living! She looks for the extraordinary in every day."

"We are true kindred spirits," agrees Susie Moore "You don't have many people in your life like that - someone who knows your soul."

During the writing of this article, person after person contacted this writer to share how much an impact Phyllis Daly had made in their lives, and how much people looked up to Phyllis, or respected her, or treasured the deep connection that they shared with her. It is clear that Phyllis has served as source of love and inspiration for many in the community.

"I have learned so many things from Mom," confides daughter Denee. "An appreciation for the beauty and wonder of nature, the magic of the holidays, the power of words, and the vital importance of being true to yourself. Mom taught me to look for the silver lining, and that the world is exciting, wonderful, and amazing, and that people are inherently decent and good. She taught me that history and tradition are valuable foundations, but to never stop learning and growing. I learned that it is okay to challenge the status quo, to ask tough questions and stand up for what I believe in."

Denee is on a roll now. "By watching Mom, I learned that differences of opinion do not translate into right and wrong, and that open dialogue, rational thinking, and honest and respectful communication can actually bring people together and energize others to get involved, too."

"I learned that if you feel passionate about something, listen to your heart. Use your head, too – be informed, get involved – Go for it! – Good things can and will happen if you believe in yourself and what you are doing," concludes Denee. "The journey may sometimes be tough, but it will also be exciting, wonderful, and amazing."

Phyllis's eldest daughter Kim would like to take this opportunity to encourage all women to be vigilant in attending to their health care needs. Ask your doctors to be vigilant, too.

If you haven't had one in the past 12 months, please do schedule appointments for a full physical, a GYN exam, and also a mammogram if you are over the age of 40.

(And having scheduled them, do be sure to keep those appointments!)

And if you have a wonderful woman in your life like my Mom, please ask her to take good care of herself. And be sure to tell her how much you love her. Do it often.

You never know if you'll have another chance to say those precious words.