

Staying Active

By Mike Burke

The novel coronavirus has disrupted the lives of nearly everyone in America, and that's been true at Collington, too. Activities like concerts, lectures, and group trips to Washington's vibrant theater, concert, and museum scene have all been cancelled. But that hasn't stopped members of this dynamic community from being active.

For many Collingtonians, days start early – very early. Typical Washington weather in summer is hot and humid. To avoid the heat of the day, many residents are up early and out walking or biking by 6:30 a.m. More than two miles of paths wind their way around and through the 125-acre campus. A handful of energetic souls head off the paths into the adjacent Regent Forest, hoping for a glimpse of a barred owl or the wild showy orchis in bloom.

“Weed Warriors,” a hardy band of volunteers, are out every Saturday morning (socially distancing) clearing vines and brush and keeping our trails open. Walkers, bikers, and Weed Warriors aren't the only early risers.

Thock! Thock-thock! The sounds from the pickleball court are unmistakable (if you can hear it above the players' chatter and laughter). On the opposite side of campus, you might hear the clack of croquet balls heading for a wicket.

The six-acre lake behind the main building on campus is a magnet. Along its shores you might encounter residents practicing Tai Chi or watching birds, binoculars in hand. Out on the water, a pair of newly acquired paddle boats allow people to explore the lake and its resident ducks, geese, frogs, and turtles up close.

The benches that dot the landscape needed attention. An ad hoc group sprang up in March to tackle the problem. Repaired and reinforced by maintenance staff, the benches were cleaned and received a fresh coat of paint by a dozen resident volunteers. Today, 15 colorful benches provide visual appeal as well as respite for tired walkers.

The attractive signage on campus is another collaborative effort. Most cedar sand-carved signs and their wooden posts got a needed makeover this spring by another group of volunteers who called themselves the POST ITS. Posts were straightened and reinforced. Dirt,

mildew, and grime were scrubbed off. A new coat of paint was applied. Resident-created gardens were added around the signposts. Across campus, the results are clear evidence of pride of place.

For many, the real pride is displayed in resident gardens. Any quick tour of campus shows off the extraordinary green thumbs at work here. Cottages and villas have stunning floral displays year-round. Apartment patios and balconies display even more patches of flowers and greenery. Collington's horticulturist keeps the common areas equally attractive.

For gardeners, whose interests lie more with food than flowers, we have two large plots, one with its own greenhouse. Residents grow a real bounty of produce: tomatoes, cucumbers, greens, summer squash, and herbs of every description. Most produce goes into residents' kitchens. Extras often show up our very own Farmer's Market, held every Tuesday and Friday in the main building.

Not all the action is outside.

The resident-run Country Store returned to service after a brief closure. To maintain physical distancing, residents can no longer

browse the convenience store's shelves. Instead, volunteers take phone orders and fill shopping bags for next-day pickup. Cereal and raisins for breakfast? Check. Paper products? Check. Snacks for that sweet tooth? Check. When residents arrive to pick up their orders, refrigerated items like milk and eggs are added to the pre-packed bags. Don't forget the ice cream!

Our library now operates much like the Country Store. Readers can pick from over 5,000 titles (the book and DVD catalog is available online). Call in your request and pick up your books tomorrow.

The Wood Shop offers repairs of lamps, sharpening of blades, and repair/refurbishing of furniture. Ham Radio continues to operate, connecting users to fellow aficionados far removed from campus.

Our normally busy auditorium hasn't been filled since March, but the show must go on. The internal Collington TV channel has brought the programs to our living rooms. Our fitness staff lead exercises. Short-story readings (especially the scary ones!) are broadcast weekly. Resident-led yoga airs regularly. So does "Songs from Our Front Porch," a mix of old ballads, new parodies, and sing-along rounds. Our Artist-in-Residence, clarinetist Dr. Natalie Groom, provided live music and

curated classical programming multiple times weekly throughout the spring. Her “Whistling Hens” duo (with soprano Jennifer Piazza-Pick) undertook a two-week virtual residency in July, featuring women composers.

Throughout the pandemic ordeal, our Residents Association has been especially valuable in collaborating with Management and the Board of Directors. Utilizing the ubiquitous ZOOM app, many RA committees are back to meeting regularly, planning and performing activities for residents.

It’s a busy place. But there is always time at the end of the day to sit out on the porch, have a beverage, and chat with neighbors and loved ones.

Then it’s time for a little reading or television before heading off to bed. You’ll need your rest. After all, tomorrow’s another busy day.

Mike Burke is a resident.