

SENIOR LIFESTYLES

Longtime friends reunite at Tier nursing residence

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ELMIRA — Helen Krovetz and Georgia Narde are living proof that it's never too late to renew a good friendship.

The Elmira natives' ties reach all the way back to the World War I era, when Helen and Georgia grew up in a tightly knit Italian neighborhood.

"We were always together when we were young. We were in the lower grades together, and we always used to play around in the street," said Georgia, 89, noting that she and Helen enjoyed staging pretend weddings.

The real thing happened in 1928 — Helen was a bridesmaid for Georgia at St. Anthony's Church, where they were both parishioners.

"She liked an usher who was in my wedding," Georgia recalled with a chuckle.

In fact, standing up in weddings for neighborhood pals became rather routine for Helen.

"I was seven times a bridesmaid," said Helen, 88. "We were good friends, all of

us."
But Georgia, after her nuptials, moved with her husband to Corning. She and Helen fell out of touch — until very recently.

"When you get married, you go with different people," remarked Helen, who also married eventually.

Their reunion occurred this past summer, when Georgia came to live at St. Joseph's Skilled Nursing Facility. It wasn't long before Georgia realized that Helen, of all people, was already living there — along with several other childhood acquaintances and friends from the same neighborhood.

"Georgia started saying, 'My best friend, Helen Krovetz, is here; I want to see Helen Krovetz,'" said Caroline Smith, who serves as the nursing facility's activities director.

Turns out that a picture of Georgia's wedding party was among the memorabilia that Georgia brought along when she moved to the nursing facility. So now the two pals enjoy reminiscing by observing themselves in the 71-year-old photo.

"We do talk a lot," Georgia said.

Helen and Georgia, both widowed, are visited frequently by numerous children and grandchildren. Smith noted that the get-togethers often turn into big feasts, with Helen assisting her family in baking that takes place at the facility.

Other times, Smith said, "Helen's whole family will come with a big pizza and stromboli."

The St. Joseph's Skilled Nursing Facility, located at St. Joseph's Hospital, contains 71 beds, including a 40-bed expan-



Mike Mergen/Photo intern

Helen Krovetz, left, and Georgia Narde look over Georgia's wedding picture from 1928. Helen was a bridesmaid in Georgia's wedding, but the two lost touch until their reunion at St. Joseph's Skilled Nursing Facility, Elmira.

sion that was opened on the hospital's fifth floor this year. Smith noted that many residents — just like Helen and Georgia — find links to former Elmira neighborhoods and parishes through each other.

In fact, Smith said, the residents' family members make similar connections when they cross paths at the nursing facility.

"The kids come in, see each other and

say, 'You lived next door to me!' They laugh about how they used to (play) in the back yards or something," Smith remarked.

Smith added that the residents' spirit gets an invaluable boost when these bonds with their roots are renewed.

"Knowing people they've known in the past is comforting, and helps them adjust," Smith said. "With that sense of familiarity, they're no longer scared."

Facility gets state's highest rating for 10th straight year

St. Joseph's Skilled Nursing Facility in Elmira was designated "deficiency-free" — the highest rating possible — for the 10th consecutive year by the New York State Department of Health.

In September, department officials made an unannounced survey of the facility. St. Joseph's Hospital, which houses the facility, announced the findings in

October.

"We have an incredible staff who work hard to provide excellent care," said Sister Marie Michael, SSJ, nursing home administrator of the skilled nursing facility. "I am proud of each of them."

The facility was expanded from 31 to 71 beds this year when the hospital completed renovation of its fifth floor.

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