

# RIMROCK *Echoes*



ST. JOHN'S  
LUTHERAN MINISTRIES

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**“Welcome one another,  
therefore, just as Christ  
has welcomed you.”**

**ROMANS 15:7**



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**2016**

**ST. JOHN'S**  
LUTHERAN MINISTRIES



## LEADERSHIP TRANSITION

St. John's experienced joyful and historic leadership transition on May 1st, 2016, when Kent Burgess retired as President and CEO, following 25 years of faithful service. David Trost, Chief Operating Officer and leader for 21 years at St. John's, was elected by the Governance Board of Directors to serve as next President and CEO. Formal congratulation and liturgical blessing were extended to both Kent and David as they begin new life chapters. As ever, St. John's remains steadfast in its mission of providing living opportunities within nurturing environments of hope, dignity and love.

Grand opening of WyndStone, a joint venture of St. John's and St. Vincent Healthcare, located in the Billings Heights, was celebrated in October. By year-end 2016, 78% of Independent Living and Independent Living with Supportive Services apartments had already become occupied or reserved, making WyndStone the most rapidly filling senior living home in the United States.



Senior Independence of Montana Home Health, a joint venture between St. John's, the Billings Clinic and Big Sky Senior Services, provided care to 325 patients in Yellowstone County in 2016. Senior Independence of Montana Hospice received license in June to provide hospice services. In the first six months, 28 patients received care. The majority of these resided on the St. John's campus, but care is now being provided for patients throughout Yellowstone County.

## PEOPLE SERVED

In 2016, St. John's Lutheran Ministries provided housing for over 1,300 senior adults throughout Montana; daily care for 143 children within the on-campus Center for Generations; internships, scholarships, classes and learning opportunities to over 240 students; and rehabilitation and pharmacy support to over 150 residents within rural communities.

ANNUAL REPORT  
**2016**

**Lutheran Social Services**  
OF MONTANA

## PHILANTHROPY

St. John's and Lutheran Social Services are grateful for generous donors. Our Endowment funds total nearly \$4 million and provide enough income to meet 10% of charity care provided in 2016. The balance is funded through program fees, deferring maintenance and a workforce willing to serve within the confines of limited resources. Growth in philanthropic resources will increase our confidence to deliver services and improve quality of care at a time when our confidence in traditional sources of funding is diminishing.

Please consider these ministries in your annual and planned giving.  
Call the Foundation Office at **406.655.5332**, or go on-line at **www.sjlm.org** or **www.lssmt.org** to send gifts of hope, dignity and love.  
**Thank you!**

Lutheran Social Services and St. John's Lutheran Ministries have been united in mission since 2002. In 2016, staff across Montana assisted 45 individuals dealing with an unplanned pregnancy and facilitated 10 domestic adoption placements. Although the number of birth parents who choose adoption for their children is declining nationwide, the number of families hoping to grow their families through adoption is high. In 2016, Lutheran Social Services received 64 inquiries from families expressing an interest in adoption. Currently there are 4 families ready and waiting to be placed with a child and 8 more families in the process of becoming licensed in order to be placed with a child. Search and reunion requests were fielded from 17 LSS birthparents and adoptees and 2 reunions were orchestrated. For the 11th consecutive year, LSS was awarded a Dave Thomas Foundation Grant to help match children in state foster care with forever families. Our Wendy's Wonderful Kids recruiter, Diana Tolstedt, worked with 32 children and 48 families, which resulted in 8 foster children finding permanent homes. Six of these eight were adoptions and two were guardianships. 384 hours of therapeutic counseling and consultation were provided by LSS to people in 2016, including services to Lutheran pastors of the Montana Synod.

# 1,809 Days

## A FOREVER FAMILY

When you are 7 years old, what does 1,809 days mean? It means a lifetime, because that's more days than you can actually remember: 1,809 days is 4 years, 11 months, 13 days.

For Damean Dahlke, now 8 years old, 1,809 represents the number of days he spent in the foster care system in 11 different placements. The best number in Damean's long, short life is 365 – the number of days since being adopted into his Forever Family on March 24, 2016.

Last year, with the help of Lutheran Social Services of Montana and the Wendy's Wonderful Kids program, Damean found his forever family with Debbie and Dennis Dahlke of Shepherd, MT. The Dahlke's have 10 children: 1 born to them and 9 born in their hearts – 4 through adoption and 5 currently in their care as guardians. It takes a lot of courage, love and patience to raise such a large family, especially one that has experienced impermanence.

Debbie's earliest memory of giving back comes from her mother's work at a nursing home in Minnesota. Deb volunteered with many of the activities and loved engaging with the elders. At the same time, her dad was a federal agent in the Twin Cities area and would talk to his kids about the homeless people they saw on the streets. He gave them a new perspective on what was going on in the world – what reality really looks like for many people.

One of the children remembers that reality. When asked what it means to have a forever family, Keyona, 14, responded "It means I have a bed to sleep in and don't have to sleep in cars and hotels." Keyona has been with the Dahlke's for 8 years and the memory of not having a place to sleep still stays with her. Having a forever family is everything because it means stability.

The success of the Dahlke family comes from having an open mind and realistic expectations of the children. "Love and consistency doesn't mean the kids don't still have baggage. Love doesn't fix the past," says Deb. Dennis agrees that it takes time and that key is not to be pushy about the kids responding to their love. "Be open to what the kids need," is his guiding principle.

The Dahlke's continue to navigate their journey alongside Diana Toldstedt, Lutheran Social Services Wendy's Wonderful Kids recruiter. According to Diana, children served by WWK are 300% more likely to be adopted. LSS has received a Wendy's Wonderful Kids grant from the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption for 11 years running. Thanks to Diana, LSS of MT is the longest consecutive grant recipient since the grant's inception in 2004.

When asked what it means to the kids she works with to find some sort of permanence, Diana responded, "Hope. Hope that they are worthy of a family. Finally, someone believes that I deserve a family. Many of these kids, through no fault of their own, have been bounced around. And many of them get a bad rap once they are in the system." Diana says that kids believe the myth that something is wrong with them when they find themselves without a family. That's one of her biggest challenges to overcome – building trust with the kids and "having them know that they aren't going to be thrown away again."

LSS is a ministry of St. John's and a non-profit organization sponsored by the Lutheran churches in Montana and Northern Wyoming and by the many generous donors to St. John's annual fund and the Inga Rygg Endowment with the St. John's Foundation. Through adoption services, birthparent counseling and foster family services LSS joins hearts in hope. For more information on becoming a child's forever family, please contact Diana Tolstedt at 406-245-9949 or email her at [dtolstedt@sjlm.org](mailto:dtolstedt@sjlm.org). If you would like more information on how you can support the mission of LSS and St. John's with a financial gift, please contact Rachel Simonson, St. John's Foundation Gift Planner at 406-655-7783 or email her at [rsimonson@sjlm.org](mailto:rsimonson@sjlm.org).

Just like his dad, Damean is a boy of few words. But his sister Mia said it all last year at Damean's adoption ceremony as she told the judge, "I'm glad he's going to be my brother. I love him so much." With grateful hearts, we thank the LSS donors who ensure that more kids like Damean can say that 1 day with a forever family is greater than 1,809 without one.



# WyndStone Update

Excitement about WyndStone, St. John's newest senior living community, located in the Billings's Heights, has continued with high interest since opening in October.

Independent Living apartments are currently 80% reserved or already occupied. There are, however, many beautiful styles with amazing views remaining for reservation and occupancy. WyndStone is offering a Last Chance Benefit with a \$3,000 Entrance Fee savings for those who move in between February 3rd and June 3rd, 2017.

Meadowlark Landing at WyndStone offers Independent Living with Supportive Services, which includes three meals per day and help with tasks such as medication management, bathing and dressing as needed. Apartments have lovely kitchenettes with refrigerators and microwaves. Many have outdoor patios. Caring staff are available day and night to offer support and companionship. Currently 7 of the 16 apartments are occupied.

Novak Cottage provides assisted living and memory support in a warm, inviting cottage environment. Private studio and one-bedroom apartments are spacious, bright and cheerful! Novak Cottage also provides three meals per day, and has its own specially trained staff available 24/7 to serve its residents. We are now ready to accept our first residents to live within this beautiful, home-like cottage!

**If you or someone you know would benefit from our levels of living at WyndStone, please call 406-655-7700 to learn more or schedule a visit!**



# Summer Concert Series 20th Anniversary

Wow! Twenty years! Although snow and cold have persisted during winter months, this is an early reminder that St. John's is about to celebrate its 20th anniversary year of providing outdoor summer concerts. Thousands of people will soon gather on warm summer evenings to enjoy tasty food dishes, fabulous music, dancing, ice cream treats and the joy of being together at the St. John's Town Square.

Musical artists for the SCS will soon be publicly announced. In the meantime, take out your calendar and reserve the following Thursday evenings:

- June 22nd - Summer Concert at WyndStone in the Billings Heights.
- June 29th - Summer Concert at The Crossings in Laurel.
- July 6th through August 3rd - Summer Concerts at the St. John's Town Square.
- August 10th - Summer Concert in Red Lodge.



# New Administrative Intern!

St. John's welcomes its newest administrative intern, Jordy Donovan, who began a six-month learning experience in late January. Jordy is now part of a long and valued story of administrative interns that St. John's has had relationship with.

Jordy first learned about an internship opportunity when he met St. John's President and CEO, David Trost, at a Big Sky Economic Development Authority event. Jordy already knew that St. John's was a senior living community of some kind, but expresses that he had no idea about the of services St. John's provides to people of all ages. This reality was appealing to him.

Jordy grew up on a 10,000 acre farm near Kremlin, Montana. Upon graduation from high school, Jordy sought to "explore a world beyond the high-line." He enrolled at Rocky Mountain College in Billings, majoring in business and minoring in leadership and economics.

When asked about his initial impressions about St. John's, Jordy replied, "I have never experienced an organization that is so committed to the people it serves and its mission as much as I have experienced at St. John's. This place is totally driven by its mission and by its desire to provide quality care. This was surprising to me, but I love it!"

Although Jordy is deeply committed to grow and learn as much as possible from his experience at St. John's, he hopes to eventually return to the family farm near Kremlin where he will pursue an agricultural life-style and vocation. Jordy says, "St. John's is already helping me to become a more prepared person to serve the needs of the world. By the time my internship is completed, I wonder what I will learn and take back to the farm?"

Again, welcome to you, Jordy, and congratulations to you and your fiancé, as you both plan for a July wedding!



## Legacy Circle

*Would you like to leave an enduring and loving impact in the world?  
Would you like to touch the lives of others with care and grace?*

*If so, you are invited to enter the St. John's Legacy Circle!*

**Options for entering . . .**

- **Include the St. John's Foundation as beneficiary of an estate gift.**
- **Include the St. John's Foundation as beneficiary within your will or life insurance.**
- **Create a Charitable Gift Annuity or offer a planned gift of \$10,000 or more in value to the St. John's Foundation.**



The St. John's Foundation has established the Legacy Circle as a way to stir philanthropy and honor generous people who seek to ensure St. John's future capacity of providing living opportunities within nurturing environments of hope, dignity and love.

Invitations will soon be extended to Legacy Circle donors to attend a complimentary appreciation event in late April. This gathering will include a delicious full-course sit-down meal, live musical entertainment, and presentation of a newly created Legacy Circle work of art to all honorees.

Montana artist, Tim Shinabarger, was commissioned to create the Legacy Circle bronzed sculpture, which features the St. John's Lutheran Ministries logo.

Contact the **St. John's Foundation** at 406-655-5710 if you desire to learn more about entering the St. John's Legacy Circle. There is still time to be welcomed as an inaugural honoree!



# Center for Generations 20th Anniversary

## LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS

On March 17th, 1997 the St. John's Center for Generations (CFG) first opened its doors to welcome children and their parents. The original location was a few blocks down the road at King of Glory Lutheran Church. It would not be until September 26th, 1999 that construction was completed and a grand opening celebration was held for CFG at its current location within the Legacy Building on primary campus of St. John's.

During its first 20 years of caring for children, CFG has evolved and thrived in the midst of transitions relating to staffing, curriculum programming, space adaptation, and engagement with the St. John's community. Thousands of children have shared in creative educational programming and life-enriching social development during their days within CFG. In fact, CFG's life-span is long enough that some of the very first children cared for have matured to now serve on staff at St. John's. Imagine that, missional people begetting missional people!

In December, 2016, CFG officially spoke words of thanksgiving and farewell to its beloved and long-time director, Jessica French. Jessica offered valued leadership and joyful presence at CFG.

Leadership transition has been thoughtfully and seamlessly attended to. Among applicants for newly structured leadership roles, three current staff members within the CFG were interviewed and hired. Leatrice Spence, will now serve as CFG Coordinator. Aubourn Kjensmo, will now also serve as CFG Staffing and Family Coordinator. Sarah Forney, will now also serve as Education Specialist. We congratulate these three as they begin new responsibilities and continue their good work together with 18 other full and part-time colleagues.



### *What do you most love about serving within CFG?*

Leatrice Spence beams and says, "The smiles and hugs from the children are wonderful! I think that is why so many of our staff remain working here. They love the children and they all know that the work they do is important. St. John's is a wonderful place to work! That cannot be said enough!"

### *Intergenerational Connections*

Leatrice was also asked about the importance of intergenerational connections that emerged since earliest days of CFG's story. She replied, "The children are caregivers to the residents and the residents are caregivers to the children. It's beautiful across the St. John's campus. Everyone is ministering to everyone else. It's one of the best things that happens for both our children and residents. Parents love this about CFG!"

### *Star Quality!*

In recent years, CFG has pursued measurable excellence through a program called "Stars to Quality." In brief time, CFG has risen to "Star II" status by state evaluation standards, which has resulted in \$10,000 of annual federal grant support for re-investment into staff training and programming. The combination of quality care provided and staff dedication contribute to CFG now being one of the largest child care providers in Yellowstone County. Word that CFG has licensed capacity to serve 137 children is often a surprise to people who generally think of St. John's as providing quality care to senior adults. Age-span of children served within CFG ranges from infants to school-age, including an after school program relating to Boulder and Arrowhead Elementary Schools.

### *More to Come!*

20 years of growing excellence in child-care ministry – that's CFG! It's fun to look back and smile at the goodness that has happened in its first two decades of life. It's fun also to look ahead and smile at the goodness and possibilities that are yet to happen during the next two decades of its life.



# Rehabilitation and Transitional Care Leadership Transition

In May, 1996, St. John's opened its newly remodeled Rehabilitation Center near the East Entrance of the Legacy Building. Name was given in memory of Helen Jorgensen, who prior to her death in 1995, had been a driving force for St. John's to expand and improve upon its capacity to provide rehabilitative healthcare services. Since the days when Helen's persistent voice rang out, rehabilitative services at St. John's have continued to expand and improve, due to the professional attention and creativity offered by many people.

Among those who ably followed in Helen's steps was Shellee Ager, who eventually served for many years as St. John's Director of Rehabilitation and Transitional Care. When Shellee began serving as a physical therapist at St. John's in November, 1998, she was one of 6 therapists on staff. By the time Shellee completed her work at St. John's in December, 2016, she was directing a team of 37 people comprised of physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists and rehabilitation techs.

After 18 years of offering therapeutic care and professional leadership at St. John's, Shellee accepted a new leadership role for a team of therapists in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, where she is eager to continue professional growth and engage in some new life ventures.

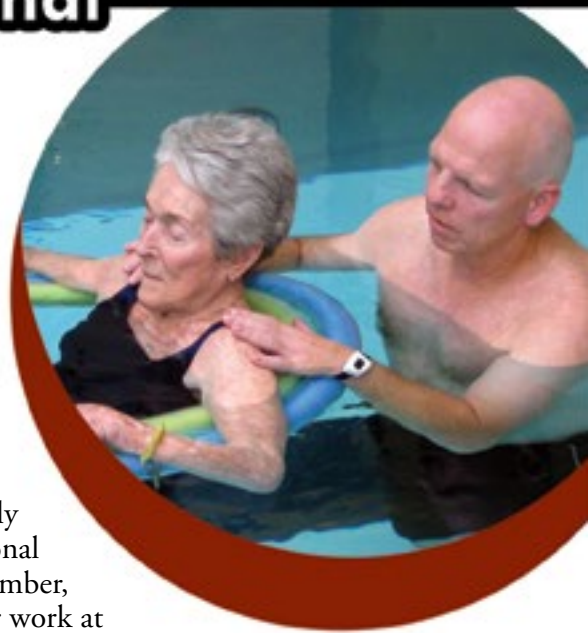
When asked to reflect on Shellee's valued presence at St. John's, Karna Rhodes, Executive Director for Health Services, said, "How blessed this place was to have had Shellee Ager. She was instrumental in developing strong rehabilitation services within the healthcare ministry that St. John's provides to people of Yellowstone County and beyond. She is a visionary woman who had a passion for the mission of this place."

In looking back at the rich experiences she had at St. John's, Shellee remarked, "St. John's Lutheran Ministries will forever be deep in my heart. Every person I worked with through the years, I consider a friend. They are all amazing human beings. As transitional care services developed, it was a privilege to serve in a leadership role, working alongside all of the staff who took pride in their work every day. There is such a commitment to excellence and quality of care at St. John's. I will miss everyone!"

Stepping into leadership role as newly appointed Director of Rehabilitation and Transitional Care will be Mike Kouwenhoven, a physical therapist who has served on staff since September, 2006. When asked to comment on the leadership transition, Karna Rhodes added, "How good God is to provide someone like Mike, who will continue serve the mission of St. John's and faithfully seek to grow rehabilitative services just as Shellee did. With all humility, I sincerely believe that St. John's will continue to provide rehabilitative care for senior adults about as well as anyone in the region."

When Mike was asked about stepping into this new role, he grinned and spoke, "First of all, I will tell you that Shellee Ager was a transformative leader. She was a great mentor to me and to everybody. Shellee was instrumental in growing our Rehab Department from what it was, which was small, to what it now is - two Transitional Care Units totaling 32 beds, a robust center for outpatient rehabilitation, and a growing provider for home healthcare rehab. I have lots to learn in my new role. The position has already stretched me personally and professionally, but I am enjoying it. I am excited by the services that St. John's can offer to people within our community."

Heartfelt thanksgiving and farewell to you, Shellee, as you settle into new responsibilities and life in Wyoming. Heartfelt thanksgiving and support to you, Mike, as you settle into new responsibilities at St. John's.





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## You Can Make a Difference!

Be part of something more this year and become a volunteer! Volunteers are an important and critical component of our ministry. We live in a high-tech world of computers, e-mail, cell phones, lap tops and iPads. However, these things do not care for people...people care for people. The ministry of St. John's is very much people intensive. In partnership with our staff, you as a volunteer serve as the hands of Christ. There can be no more important work as we carry out our mission of providing living opportunities within a nurturing environment of hope, dignity, and love. Some examples of volunteer opportunities are: bingo caller, personal shopper, letter writer and crafting just to name a few. Student and corporate group volunteers are always welcome as well!



To volunteer there is an interview process that is conducted to better understand a person's interests and find the perfect place for them. To inquire about the many rewarding volunteer positions please contact one of the following communities:

**St. John's Lutheran Ministries**  
**Billings Westend**  
 Shelly Hoovestall  
 655-5638  
 mhoovestall@sjlm.org

**Senior Independence Hospice**  
**Billings, MT**  
 Trudi Paulson  
 655-5803  
 tpaulson@sjlm.org

**Mission Ridge/Vista**  
**Billings Westend**  
 Tina Price  
 655-5736  
 kprice@sjlm.org

**WyndStone**  
**Billings Heights**  
 Whitney Buechler  
 325-8605  
 wbuechler@sjlm.org

**The Crossings**  
**Laurel, MT**  
 Beth Hoferer  
 628-5017  
 bhoferer@sjlm.org

**Willows**  
**Red Lodge, MT**  
 Marsha Sullivan  
 406-446-1020  
 msullivan@sjlm.org