



# jewish news

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## Sharing a musical moment

Phoenix Symphony violinist Dumitru Lazarescu serenades a resident of Huger Mercy Living Center while participating in a research study on the impact of music on people with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. See story on Page 10.

Photo courtesy of Phoenix Symphony

## JCF offers grandparenting keys

**SALVATORE CAPUTO** | Assistant Managing Editor

Jerry Witkovsky encourages grandparents to take an active role in their grandchildren's lives to help teach them values that endure *v'dor v'dor*, from generation to generation, while unleashing the grandchildren to enrich the family's legacy of values

researched and wrote his book.

"I'm really trying to unleash the creativity in grandparents as they express their desire to be part of their grandchildren's lives," Witkovsky told Jewish News in a phone interview from his home in Chicago last week. "Often we struggle with who we are, what we

## NOWGen Giving Circle allocates first grants

**LEISAH WOLDOFF** | Managing Editor

The Jewish Federation of Greater Phoenix NOWGen Giving Circle announced its inaugural funding grants at the end of August, allocating \$19,500 to local, national and interna-





Phoenix Symphony violinist Dian D'Avanzo dances with one of Huger Mercy Living Center's residents while her colleagues, Jenna Daum and Michael D'Avanzo play in the background. *Photos courtesy of the Phoenix Symphony*

# Bridging the gaps of memory through music

## a closer look: seniors

MARILYN HAWKES | Staff Writer

For the residents of Huger Mercy Living Center, listening to music is nothing new. The center provides live performances once a week and tries to integrate music into a variety of other activities. But when members of The Phoenix Symphony came to play a series of concerts for the residents in late spring, there was a different feeling in the air.

The performances took place in the residents' cottages at the center, a 48-bed assisted-living facility in Phoenix under the auspices of Barrow Neurological Institute, which provides care for people living with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias (ADRD). During the concerts, groups of men and women listened to musicians play big band tunes, military songs, standards, bluegrass and classical favorites. The music inspired some to get up and dance and tap their toes to the beat. Others smiled and listened attentively, while a few had little reaction and sat hunched over and motionless.

The concerts were part of a research

collaboration among the Phoenix Symphony, Banner Alzheimer Institute, Arizona State University College of Nursing & Health Innovation and Huger Mercy Living Center to study the impact of music on Alzheimer's patients during a six-week program of musical intervention.

The project was spurred by a Phoenix Symphony grant from the Ann and Gordon Getty Foundation to develop "The B-Sharp Music Wellness, a W.O.N.D.E.R. Project: Alzheimer's Expansion Pilot Initiative Program." "W.O.N.D.E.R." is an acronym for Walton Optimal Neurological Discovery Education and Research.

The project was launched after Dr. Eric Reiman, executive director of the Banner Alzheimer Institute and professor of neuroscience at ASU, convened a meeting connecting Dr. David W. Coon, associate dean and professor at ASU's College of Nursing & Health Innovation, the Phoenix Symphony, and other interested colleagues.

The first phase of the pilot

study included a series of focus groups to determine how music might affect the Huger residents with dementia, their family caregivers, the staff and the musicians. After a review of the literature and obtaining Institutional Review Board approval, the research team designed the study, which aimed to measure residents' emotional well-being and behavior as well as the emotional well-being of caregivers, staff and the musicians.

Then, over a six-week period, groups of symphony musician volunteers went to Huger to play for the residents and were assisted by ASU music therapy and nursing students as well as Huger Mercy Living Center staff members.

By all accounts, the results were positive. In most cases, residents became actively involved, dancing, clapping, tapping a drum or singing. Initial results showed significant increases in positive mood and reductions in negative mood before and after the music events, according to Coon, the key investigator who evaluated the findings.

Phoenix Symphony violinist Dian D'Avanzo, who along with her husband, Michael, a cellist with the orchestra, volunteered for the project, observed many of those positive mood changes.

"The first time we went, you could tell the residents were really apprehensive and then we played and they seemed to enjoy it," Dian says. "Each week, they seemed more and more responsive, and when we came in they knew what was going on."

Many residents appear to enjoy the music, but aren't able to express their

feelings verbally, Dian says. After one of the concerts, a female resident approached Dian and took her hand. "I leaned in because she's never spoken and she reached up and gave me a kiss," Dian says. "It just melted my heart."

When the project was over, Dian found it difficult to leave the residents, because she had formed relationships with many of them. "They're my people now," she says. "These are intelligent, capable and amazing people, and I think if they respond to something like this, it can enrich their lives. I feel very fortunate to do a little something to make their day better."

Lisa O'Toole, manager of the assisted-



Violinist Dian D'Avanzo plays a tune for the residents in their cottage living area.

living center, also noted the changes in residents, especially as the project progressed. "I saw in the moment how happy the residents were and that they did recognize when the musicians came in with their musical instruments," she says. "When it's something they have back in their long-term memory – maybe they used to go to the symphony or to see plays – they come up to that level." O'Toole also noted that the musicians made unique connections with some of the residents. "One of the musicians said that every time he came, a particular resident would look at him and not take her eyes off of him, so he made a point of dancing with her. How special is that?"

One moment that stands out for Coon happened on the first day when a resident, who had a musical background before dementia, approached him several times after the performance and asked if she could donate \$20 to



After the interactive performance, symphony members mingle with the residents.

the Phoenix Symphony. "Her ability to remember that (connection with) the Phoenix Symphony and the look on her face was amazing," he says. "It was so beautiful."

As part of the study, musicians, staff and residents submitted to saliva tests at different times across the project to measure certain biomarkers that indicate both positive and negative behavior changes. Coon reported that while the results are preliminary, changes in biomarkers appear related to positive energetic mood.

The results also suggest that music may have enabled the residents to better regulate their stress response before and after a stressful event, such as showering, Coon says.

"One of the most fascinating pieces to me was watching these relationships develop between musicians and the individuals who are on the journey of dementia," Coon says. "To see that connection happen, to observe music as a vehicle to help trigger long-term memories and bridge gaps in the moment, and to connect to someone in a way when they've struggled to connect – all that is pretty powerful."

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