



# Friends House

## NEWSLETTER

### Resident Profile: Virginia Thornthwaite

by Barbara Hodgkinson



Virginia knew what direction she wanted her life to take before she entered Antioch College. Growing up in Tennessee with a father who strongly opposed racism, she was interested in human nature, civil rights and income inequality.

Antioch's work-study program allowed Virginia to work at a Syracuse, NY, settlement house, the Cleveland City Planning Dept., and finally a consumer cooperative in Michigan, where she met her future husband, Fred, and became involved in the work that would occupy her entire working life. Three years later Fred and Virginia were married.

Fred was a volunteer with the Eastern Michigan Association of Cooperatives. In 1942, a cooperative-owned milk route was started and Fred was hired in 1945 as manager. In spite of operating a dairy for 10 years and adding 19 milk routes, the milk business had no future. In 1960, the co-op dairy became Cooperative Services, Inc. and embarked the next year in a cooperative optical

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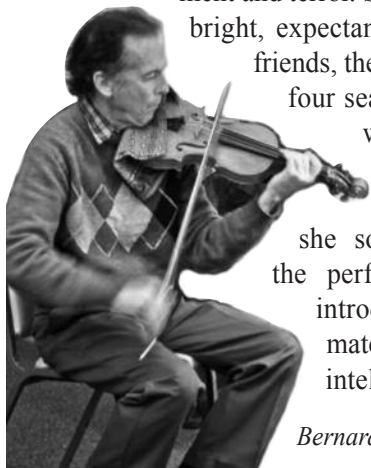
### Magical, Musical Sunday Moments

by Betsy Harrell

At four minutes to 3:00, the heart rate of the musical event organizer—we'll call her Pearl—begins to calm. She observes that a very decent-sized audience of Friends House residents looks primed to listen. Guest musicians are quietly seated up front by the fireplace, waiting to be introduced, poised to play. This particular Sunday afternoon, there are two violinists, a violist and a cellist, all with stunning credentials. Doubtless their hearts are also throbbing at this moment of anticipation. Pearl thankfully sees more people streaming into the library and realizes that before every event she suffers the same needless anxiety.

Indeed, our community always provides a good audience, both in numbers and gratitude. This is fortunate, since we offer guest musicians no compensation except appreciation and refreshments. If we sometimes curiously inquire why they freely share their time and talents to play and sing at Friends House, we get hints that it's because we are appreciative, lively and responsive as an audience. Probably the musicians are also pleased to know their performances are a community service. Certainly some Friends House residents couldn't afford to buy tickets to hear a lot of concerts elsewhere, nor arrange their own transportation.

At 3:00, Pearl's heart still flutters with excitement and terror. She surveys the bright, expectant faces of her friends, then smiles at the four seated musicians with bows at the ready. Praying that she somehow finds the perfect words to introduce and ultimately thank them intelligently, she



*Bernard Chevalier*

begins the recital with a glad welcome. The afternoon will top off with a reception prepared by the residents' Hospitality Committee.



*The Fondettes*

The Program Committee favors a mix of musical events. Like today's, some feature classical pieces played by artists well-known to our region. Other visitors perform in venues like cafes, trying to make names for themselves and just stay afloat. We have jazz and recorder players, sopranos, accordionists, dancers, folklorists and more. Occasionally, musicians contact Pearl to express a desire to appear at, or return to, Friends House.



*Gary Foster, pianist*

Our most unusual program so far this year was a bash on June 27 in honor of the magnificent renovation of our 1924 Mason & Hamlin grand piano; nine different pianists, including the master technician who did the restoration, were invited to play. This fall's program features "Tone Bent" and "Take Jack," comprising singers/instrumentalists Bill Horvitz, Robin Eschner and eight friends; a piano recital by Antonio Iturrioz; the Santa Rosa Symphony's Young People's Chamber Orchestra directed by Aaron Westman; and the Occidental Community Choir under Sarah Saulsbury's baton.

*Friends House is a Continuing Care Retirement Community where simplicity and vitality are valued.*

## General Information

707-538-0152

Monday through Friday  
9:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Jim Johnson  
Executive Director  
707-573-4501

Paddy Coreris  
Director of Development  
707-573-4508

Apartment Resident Services  
707-573-4504

Health Care Unit  
707-573-4517

Assisted Living Center  
707-573-4523

Volunteer Services  
707-538-0152

## Board of Directors

Liz Baker  
Ann Boone  
Millie Burt  
Suzanne Brown  
Betsy Harrell  
Stratton Jaquette  
Richard Kavinoky  
Kay Kerriden  
Joseph Magruder  
Dorothy Marshall  
Sam Miller  
Jan Moore  
Hubert Morel-Seytoux  
Scott Smith  
Susan Stanley  
Tom Whiteman  
Kale Williams (Clerk)



**Friends Association of Services for the Elderly**  
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fase@friendshouse.org  
[www.friendshouse.org](http://www.friendshouse.org)

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Message from the Executive Director  
Jim Johnson

## Friends House is "A Calling"

This is the way I hold Friends House, that it's a "calling" for those who are here, or hope to be here.

I would say that one measure of the calling here is for simplicity. The residents have spent their lives raising families, building careers, achieving. As they grow older, these folks are looking at a change of pace, and looking for like-minded travelers to share a smaller space. Residents universally have given up the homes where they spent a measure of their lives. They've moved from these larger homes to quite modest apartments, and paid over \$100,000 to subject themselves to the discipline of downsizing. If they had moved into most of the other Friends retirement communities in the East, they wouldn't have had to downsize. The same is true for many other Continuing Care Retirement Communities here on the West Coast.

We talk plenty about Friends House as an intentional community, and that's another part of the calling. People here are looking for relationships. They don't want to spend the rest of their lives in the nuclear family. It's that time of life where a community of peers beckons.

Residents forge relationships with each other in numerous ways. One example is through worship. At Friends House, a Quaker-inspired community, you might expect that worship would be a way to come together. There's a small group in the library every morning for a circle of silent meditation, and on First Day the group expands, with nearby friendly neighbors joining. Another small group, a Buddhist sangha, meditates together one evening a week. Other people attune together with the divine in different ways and places.

Residents also create relationships by continuing their life-long work toward social justice as part of the Peace and Justice group. They want environmental justice, too. There is tremendous uniformity of beliefs, but not without a fair share of questioning. The bi-monthly birthday parties provide still another venue for residents to make friendships; everyone can just relax and enjoy

each other's company. The same goes for the many different programs that residents collaborate in organizing throughout the week. And it's truly a joy to see the camaraderie at the four Cluster lunches. The warmth is palpable as new residents are integrated into the gatherings.

A calling for service to our neighbors, who inexorably decline in health has been an important calling at Friends House since its inception. Yet now, with recent decisions regarding healthcare delivery, such service will take on added importance.

This is because Friends House has reached a defining moment in its 26-year existence. The board, in unity, has decided to close the Health Care Unit by the end of the fiscal year, March 31, 2011. The healthcare landscape will change. The board, its committees, and staff are laboring to replace skilled nursing with an expanded assisted living or personal care facility, with the potential of becoming a fifth cluster. When those neighbors who require more help move to personal care, special friends from the apartments will help them stay integrated within the activities of the greater community. As this Quaker-inspired community models love and compassion for those who really need it, this calling for service will be a model for others.



*Lawrence Holmefjord-Sarabi performs at Friends House before leaving for his first year at the National University of Singapore.*

# "May I Help You?"

by Betsy Harrell

The ready laughter, bright eyes, and voice repeating her constant refrain, "May I help you?" belong to Shirlee Pierce. She is the Thursday-Friday presence behind the lobby counter of Friends House. The equally welcoming demeanor, smile of pleasure greeting all comers, and voice inquiring, "May I help you?" belong to Emele Vere, the Monday-to-Wednesday receptionist at the Front Desk.



Emele (left) and Shirlee (right) — our friendly receptionists.

This pair, 9 AM to 4 PM, shepherd newcomers in the right direction, answer incessant phone calls and handle residents' interminable wants. They cobble together our in-house weekly newsletter, run the photocopier, and blast away at the

computer whenever possible. They unravel problems with easy charm. These staff members are dearly appreciated by us who live and labor here, and have made good friends among us.

Both gained experience through previous office jobs. Before coming to Friends House eight years ago, Shirlee was an office manager. Eventually she wanted a change, something new in life after losing her husband of 35 years to illness. She explains, "I was looking for a fun place to work with people who loved their jobs and smiled a lot." As for Emele (pronounced like Emily), she's from the Fiji Islands and worked there in an office and with students at the Anglican Theological College. When asked how come she knows such good English, which isn't her native tongue, she mentions former British rule of her country. After emigrating with her family to California in 2006, Emele almost immediately "joined the Friends House family" as staff. Clearly, she feels pride to be succeeding so well in this foreign land.

Emele's desire to help others shows up also in her second Friends House position, which is working Thursdays and Fridays as a Resident Services Aide assigned to two apartment residents; she assists them with laundry, taking walks, and "mostly making it their best day."

Shirlee loves traveling. She got the itch because she and her husband, a captain on the American

President Shipping Lines, traveled the world together. Emele loves singing, dancing and promoting Fijian culture.

Since the receptionists work different days, how do they coordinate tasks? They record office happenings in the log book and can confer instantly through Speed Dial. "There's something special between us and we work together with ease," says Shirlee. "We are great partners," continues Emele, who admits that being employed in a strange country, in a public spot like the Front Desk, sometimes produces anxiety.

Shirlee has come to think of staff and residents here as her family. Her motto is "As long as I'm having fun at Friends House I will stay as long as you need me!" Emele says, "I call Friends House my second home (after Fiji). This wonderful community reminds me of my island lifestyle, where in the village we take care of neighbors, are always available to help one another, and greatly respect elders."

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*"Resident Profile" continued...*

service and co-op housing for the elderly.

Virginia's life with the dairy co-op began with scrubbing floors, stocking shelves, and telling customers about the co-op. As the co-op evolved, Virginia worked as education director, building liaison, receptionist and bookkeeper. She was also involved with the newsletter and personnel management. Along the way she raised two wonderful sons, with hired help at home and a very helpful husband. Of working with the cooperative, Virginia says that the best part of it all was the people they worked with and those they met at national and international co-op meetings.

During the 70s Fred and Virginia came to love

the Virgin Islands, and in 1984 they bought a home on St. John. Years before Fred had made enemies at HUD when Nixon had illegally impounded money for low-income senior housing and the co-op had successfully sued and received a judgment for the funding of 2000 units. After that, HUD would not process the co-op's loan applications as long as the Thornthwaites were involved. Fred and Virginia happily retired and were free to spend winters in St. John until Fred's health diminished. Since being widowed in 2004, Virginia has spent every winter in St. John.

Virginia has never stopped being involved in community. In St. John, she worked with the Unitarian Fellowship on a recycling program. While president of the local Audubon Society,

she helped to save a small pond by getting it declared a Wildlife Refuge. During the 80s, she served on the Board of the National Low-Income Housing Coalition. At Friends House, Virginia has been on the FASE Board and currently serves on the Planning and Development Committees. She also serves on the Resident Buildings and Grounds Committee and has been secretary and treasurer of the Apartment Residents' Association. She is a treasure to have at Friends House!

Saturday, November 20, 2010  
10 a.m. – 3 p.m.

## Holiday Faire & Quaker Tea at Friends House

Handmade Gift Items  
Guatemalan Crafts and Clothing  
Craft Demonstrations & Sales

Albino Pachyderm  
Thrift Shop

*Experience a Quaker Tea*

\$15 per person – morning or afternoon sittings

For more information call  
707-538-0152  
or email: [pcoreris@friendshouse.org](mailto:pcoreris@friendshouse.org)



### FRIENDS HOUSE

*A Quaker-Inspired Elder Community*  
684 Benicia Drive, Santa Rosa, CA 95409  
[www.friendshouse.org](http://www.friendshouse.org)



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## Upcoming Events

Please join us for these  
fun events!

**October 31, 3:00 PM**  
Antonio Iturrioz, Pianist

**November 18, 7:15 PM**  
SR Symphony's Young  
People's Chamber Orchestra

**November 20, 10:00 AM**  
Holiday Faire & Quaker Tea  
*See box above for details.*



Press Democrat

**December 8, 7:15 PM**  
Occidental Community Choir

## Friends House is Changing & We Need your Help

**C**hange = remodel, transform, convert, evolve, restructure, etc. Friends House has big ideas and we need your help.

Northern California Quakers opened the doors to Friends House in 1984, where elders from all walks of life could live in a community supportive of a dignified aging process and participate to their full potential. Beginning this year, approximately 10,000 people in the U.S. will become 65 every day for the next 15 years. There will be approximately 90 million people over 65 by 2025. Friends House is changing to do its part, one phase at a time, to meet the needs of elders by being a unique model community.

As part of restructuring the care model of Friends House, the Assisted Living Center will be expanded, moving from its current campus location to the North Wing of our main building. It is expected that the new facility will be called the Personal Care Center.

One of our houses, currently the Business Office, will be rebuilt to create additional

independent living space for prospective residents on our waiting list.

Future phases will include remodeling the former Assisted Living Center building to meet the evolving needs of the community, and developing properties contiguous to Friends House to expand our independent living capacity.

Please give generously and help us reach our expansion goals to meet the ever-increasing need for additional housing and care for elders.

If you do not wish to receive future newsletters and/or fundraising solicitations from Friends House, please contact Paddy at 707-573-4508 or by email at [pcoreris@friendshouse.org](mailto:pcoreris@friendshouse.org).

### We Love Book Donations

Friends House Library needs used books. Contact Harriett Gordon at 707-576-6606 or [ffrybooks@yahoo.com](mailto:ffrybooks@yahoo.com).

*Unless otherwise noted, all photos by Paul Burks.*