

## COVER FEATURE

# ACKNOWLEDGING ACTS OF KINDNESS CLUB (AAOK)

*"No act of kindness is too small.  
We rise by lifting others."*

By Kathy Kelly | Photos by Rose Day Photography

L-R: Joe Santoro, honoree Marie Anderson, Lindsay Collier

We would like to thank Robert Boissoneault Oncology Institute for bringing you this month's cover story.

**E**verybody aspires to goodwill and generosity during the holiday season. However, the mission of the Villages' Acknowledging Acts of Kindness Club (AAOK) is to recognize those among us who practice kindness all year long. Members of this special club look for acts of kindness everywhere, everyday – and then honor it in public ways. Their intention is to spread gratitude and appreciation in order to promote and grow everyday kindness in our community and beyond.

As they go about their daily routine, club members are always on the lookout for acts of kindness, empathy, altruism, compassion, generosity – and all the other synonyms for kindness – performed by individuals, groups or even employees that serve our community. Whenever they find people acting with care and consideration, they are encouraged to spotlight the action.

### **Acknowledging Acts of Kindness Club (AAOK) was started in early 2019.**

"This is the first club of its kind," said Joe Santoro, who spearheaded the formation of the club. "We believe we have some very creative ideas on how to acknowledge and promote kindness." Santoro is no stranger to the importance of promoting kindness, especially from an early age. He is the founder of the Santoro Educational Lifeskills Foundation (S.E.L.F.) and the All Children First Foundation. SELF has been very active in providing social /emotional learning (SEL) for schools and institutions in Florida and beyond with their *Alive2Thrive* program.

Author/Speaker Lindsay Collier is the current leader of the club. The club started with a core group of interested people, and has grown to 45+ members. They are always looking for new members who are dedicated to helping their cause.

People who help others are the best role models, and recognizing their acts of kindness helps to promote this behavior. Club members hope their public acknowledgements will help promote a 'culture of kindness'.

### **Three ways to honor those practicing kindness.**

Club members have developed three ways to honor those practicing kindness. Using these three levels of acknowledgment, committee members

select candidates, evaluate nominated candidates, choose and assemble appropriate gifts for recipients, tell the stories of the beneficiaries, and spread the word about acts of kindness happening all around The Villages.

### **Level One.**

What do you do when you see someone performing an act of kindness? AAOK members don't let the moment pass. As a first level of acknowledgement, members are encouraged to hand out cards to recognize acts kindness when they see it. This gives members an easy way to acknowledge everyday acts and set the tone for expanding the environment of gratitude throughout the community.

"It's not a hard thing to do," says Collier. Members are prompted to hand out cards and simply say, "Hi, I couldn't help but notice that you have a great attitude





*(or just did something very kind, etc) and when I see that, I always like to recognize these efforts by giving you two of these cards – one to recognize you for what you’ve just done and the other for you to give to someone else. That way we can help spread a culture of kindness together. Thank you again for your attitude/kindness.”*

### **Level Two.**

At the second level of acknowledgement, club members create a surprise event to publicly acknowledge those individuals or groups who have gone a step above and beyond. The process starts when someone nominates a recipient. If you know someone or a group that deserves

acknowledgement for their kind acts, you are invited to go to the club’s website, [www.aaokclub.org](http://www.aaokclub.org) and fill out their online nominee form. A committee reviews all the nominations and applicants that are chosen are in for a wonderful surprise. Club members look for creative and fun ways to acknowledge that person or group’s kindness practices. To everyone’s delight, balloons, flowers, cake, prizes can be involved!

For example, Vickie and Charlie Yates were recently acknowledged for the exceptional kindness they have shown to their neighbors in the Village of Dunedin. Both Vickie and Charlie help their fellow

Villagers regularly. Recently, AAOK members surprised them at the end of a neighborhood golf brunch, with a dozen roses and a gift. Many of their grateful neighbors were present to give testimonials and show their gratitude for the Yates’ acts of kindness. “This was a wonderful experience for them - and also us,” said Collier after the event.

### **Level Three.**

People with an extraordinary history of kindness live among us. Their exemplary habits of kindness provide models for us all to emulate. The AAOK Club members believe these folks deserve public respect and notoriety. When they find a candidate deserving of this honor, they plan to create a surprise event that brings together the recipients’ personal community of friends and family. A special committee will compile a complete story of the honoree’s model life of kindness, then gather friends and family to provide witness. Modeled after the program “This Is Your *Life*”, the event will

Continued on page 8→





Members of AAOK honor Vickie and Charlie Yates.

Honorees Anthony and Amy Donato



be the celebration of their good acts and deeds. Do you know of someone deserving such an honor? If so, why not nominate the candidate to the AAOK Club for consideration.

What other ways will the club come up with to acknowledge those who practice acts of kindness? "We're still working on new and creative ways to do this," said Collier. "Your ideas are

welcome." **The Acknowledging Acts of Kindness Club (AAOK)** meets at Bacall Recreation Center on the Second Thursday of Each Month from 12:30 pm to 2 pm. The club is open to Village Residents. For more information, visit the club's website at [www.aaokclub.org](http://www.aaokclub.org) ) or visit their Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/AcknowledgingActsOfKindness](http://www.facebook.com/AcknowledgingActsOfKindness). ■