

NYSUT RC 12 Community Service Award 2022

By Jeanne W. Bennett, CVA retiree

It is with great pleasure that RC 12 announces that the 2022 Community Service Award recipient is **Phyllis VanSteenburgh**, a retiree of the Oppenheim-Ephratah-St. Johnsville Central School District. As an inservice educator, Phyllis taught reading to students as well as was involved with annual book fairs and the creation of a school newspaper club and an after school reading program. As a Literacy Volunteer for over ten years, Phyllis's adult students met with success. Her first adult, a woman, who was reading at a second grade level when Phyllis began working with her, advanced to a sixth grade reading level. Her second student, a man, was an ESL (English as a Second Language) learner. Phyllis worked with him on conversation skills and reading and practicing common American phrases. Phyllis actively recruited literacy volunteers and presented a number of workshops to train tutors. Also, she served on the board of directors for two years.

Phyllis has written a number of informational articles for The Outlook with helpful advice for seniors. One article featured palliative care, describing what it is and how it benefits families by helping relieve pain and stress caused by serious illness through meeting emotional, spiritual and practical needs. Her article stressed the importance of putting palliative care into one's living will. Another article about diabetics explained the Libre Free System, a continuous glucose monitoring system where patients can see their glucose levels on their smartphones. In 2014, Phyllis received a NYSUT Award of Distinction in recognition of her writing and work.

Because Phyllis is familiar with the grant application process, she has successfully applied for a number of grants for the Gloversville Senior Citizen Services Center. One grant provided funding for the creation of monthly informational meetings for veterans that also provided them with a free meal. Each month, Phyllis also created new informational sheets covering topics such as where vets could get flu shots, property tax exemptions, assisted living benefits, health services, home energy assistance, and obtaining veterans status on their licenses.

In June of 2020, Phyllis was awarded a grant that allowed her to develop a smartphone literacy class for seniors. The program was divided into six classes that were designed to teach seniors how to call and store contacts, use the Internet to find needed services, download apps and use them, reach friends and family through video chat, and establish how to create a wireless connection from one's phone to a printer. Phyllis acted as an assistant to the instructor of these classes.

Another grant was awarded in September of 2020 to update outdated equipment at the senior center. This grant was used to purchase an extension ladder, snowblower, and weed-whacker for the facility. The equipment is battery operated for easy and accessible use. An up-to-date laptop was also purchased to create a newsletter and to update the center's Facebook page with information.

In October 2021, Phyllis was notified that she won a grant to install a gardening club within the Gloversville Senior Center. The money was earmarked to fund the senior center's educational and environmental programs. The start date for the club was April 2022. The funds were used to purchase pots, produce, and seeds, and to publish articles on the growth and development of the garden. All materials were purchased locally, and the edible produce will be used for the center's weekly Wednesday lunch and Saturday breakfast.

Phyllis has compiled a list of places in Fulton and Montgomery Counties where seniors can go for help. Topics include transportation, meals at specific sites, offices of the aging, places to go for activities such as senior centers, free yoga classes, and bus tours. She created "Be a Tourist in Your Own Town", a list of local places to go to visit.

Never one to rest on her laurels, Phyllis recently started Tablet Time where seniors can come in and use the Samsung and Apple tablets that the Senior Center owns. Phyllis is there to help seniors learn how to use the tablets and to do emails.

As you can see, Phyllis is truly worthy of this award. ***Congratulations, Phyllis!***