



# RESIDENT OF THE MONTH

## *Dian Leibel*

Diane Leibel's life story is one marked by curiosity, determination, and a deep commitment to service. Born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Diane spent 32 years living in St. Paul, where she grew up with one older brother and two younger sisters. Her parents, both from Germany, were raised on farms, and Diane's grandparents owned a farm in rural St. Paul where the family lived; an upbringing that shaped her strong work ethic and independence. At just 16 years old, Diane began working in a department store, quickly advancing from cashier to salesperson, manager, and eventually buyer. She specialized in accessories such as jewelry, hats, gloves, shawls, and more. At a time when most girls in her town were expected to marry rather than pursue higher education, Diane knew she wanted something different. She worked full-time, lived at home to save money, and paid her own way through college. Because she balanced a demanding work schedule with full-time classes, it took five years for her to earn her bachelor's degree from the University of Minnesota. While attending school during the day, Diane worked night shifts at the Minnesota Children's Institution.

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**During this time, she learned of President John F. Kennedy's assassination; an event that profoundly impacted her and prompted her to reconsider her career path.**

**Inspired by his legacy and a desire to help others, Diane changed her major to social work. She went on to complete both her bachelor's and master's degrees at the University of Minnesota.**

**After graduating, Diane received a call inviting her to Indiana to help establish a new community mental health center in Marion County. Moving into an unfamiliar rural community, she helped build the center from the ground up, creating 10 programs, hiring staff and psychiatrists, and overseeing operations. She worked there for 10 years, laying a strong foundation for community mental health services.**

**Never one to shy away from adventure, Diane also took pilot lessons during this time and earned her pilot's license, along with becoming scuba certified. On one scuba diving cruise, her boat was unexpectedly boarded by the Bohemian Navy, who were searching for drugs.**

**After finding none, they finally agreed to leave; only after the captain famously bribed them with lobster and two cases of beer.**

**Diane later spent 30 years at the Danville VA Medical Center, where she worked closely with Vietnam veterans. There, she developed and expanded more than 10 programs, growing a \$30,000 annual**

**budget into a million-dollar operation serving veterans across Indiana and Illinois. Throughout her career, Diane received numerous commendations for her social work, including an award and a letter of recognition from the Secretary of Veterans Affairs at an annual awards ceremony held in Ohio. Travel has always been a passion for Diane. From Venice, where she purchased a necklace she still wears, to journeys along the Nile, Amazon, and Danube Rivers; she has explored much of the world. Rather than taking photographs, she brings home pieces of art from each destination. Her next adventure is already planned for 2026: a cruise from Santiago, Chile, to Buenos Aires.**

**After retiring in 2011, Diane volunteered with the Red Cross for 10 years. Following COVID, she sought not just a home, but a true sense of community; and found it at Westminster Village. Today, Diane stays active, attends nearly every program offered, volunteers throughout the community, and especially enjoys meal delivery. She also loves working puzzles and can often be found piecing together several at a time around the community.**

**What stands out most to Diane is the care she feels every day. She is greeted with smiles, kindness, and genuine connection; and says simply, "I truly feel loved here."**