

# Dayton Daily News

## 'Super' seniors stay active, provide valuable skills

As seniors become the fastest growing group in U.S., 3 locals offer models for full living.

By [Marc Katz](#), Staff Writer

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DAYTON — Doris Miller turned 89 recently, and she missed a day of work.

Her birthday fell on a Wednesday, the day she usually volunteers in the Foundation office at Miami Valley Hospital.

Instead of going to the office, Miller helped at the Waffle Shop at Christ Episcopal Church in downtown Dayton.

The annual event — in its 81st year (yes, she pre-dates it) was Nov. 16-19.

“We served 300-600 people a day,” said Miller, who refuses to use her age as a handicap.

“You can feel sorry for yourself and sit on the couch and watch soap operas all day,” said Miller, “or, you can get out and do something.”

According to U.S. Administration on Aging data, seniors are the fastest growing population. The estimated number of people 65 and older on July 1, 2009, was more than 39.5 million, or nearly 13 percent of the population. There were nearly 28 million persons (9.1 percent) 70 or older and 5.6 million (1.8 percent) 85 and older.

While most of those folks in their 80s don't hold steady jobs, many stay active and provide necessary skills to the work force.

Here's a capsule look at three “super” seniors from the Miami Valley.

### **Charlotte Paugh, 88**

Charlotte Paugh, of Union, works at the Apple Street Homeless Shelter where she leads sewing projects for St. Vincent's and teaches piano when she is not traveling.



**Charlotte Paugh, 88, shows of a quilt she made for workers at the St. Vincent Hotel Homeless shelter. Paugh volunteers ever Tuesday at the shelter where she organizes the mail. Staff photo by Jim Noelker**

She continues also to drive, even at night.

“The sewing is a side project for St. Vincent’s,” Paugh said earlier this month as she worked at the shelter handing out packages to newcomers. “I just have an inner drive to be purposeful.

“I never say ‘no’ if I can say ‘yes.’”

Paugh, who has outlived two spouses (she was married 27 years to each), has lived in various nearby communities, but was born in Dayton and graduated from Roosevelt High School. She then attended Manchester College in Indiana for a year before marrying.

She worked for several years as a secretary for ALCOA, and upon retiring, decided to do volunteer work, initially for the Dayton Opera Guild, then the Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra Association.

“Those organizations are wonderful,” Paugh said, “but there seemed like such a tremendous need from other organizations.”

She began to teach a quilting class at the Church of the Brethren, eventually ending up at St. Vincent’s, where she began in the laundry, packing starter kits for the residents. She helps also to distribute mail and gathers several helpers at various times of the year to remake sheets to fit the beds at the center.

Since all the beds are twin size and many sheet donations are from king and queen-sized beds, Paugh has devised a way to cut the sheets down the middle and sew them back together. The leftover material is used for pillow cases.

With all this going on, Paugh has had time to travel the world through Friendship Club International. Last year, she took a cruise to the North Pole.

“It was one of the best experiences I’ve had,” Paugh said. “I’ve had an absolutely wonderful life.”

## **Mark Dehus, 90**

Mark Dehus is a 90-year-old former industrial engineer who continues to keep himself busy in woodworking.

“I like keeping active,” said Dehus, who lives in Trotwood’s Friendship Village. “I’ve had woodworking as a hobby all my life. I started as a kid making things out of boxes.”

A Fairview High School graduate, he went to the GM Institute (now Kettering University) in Flint, Mich. He has four children (three sons and a daughter), 11 grandchildren and eight great-grand children. His wife died six years ago.

“I’m fortunate enough as far as health, but I only work a couple hours a day. My durability is not what it used to be.”

He makes trains and boxes, chairs and has a large display case he made in his apartment.

His handmade Swiss Chalet doll house (furniture included) was the featured item at the Friendship Village Craft Affair last month.

In his younger days, he even built a couple of regular-size houses. When he came back from the service, he took a class in architectural drawing at Sinclair Community College, and lived for a time in Florida. He retired in 1974, while his wife, Mary, was a nurse at Good Samaritan Hospital.

“I have to push myself to get up and get to the workshop sometime,” he said. “I realize if I sit, that will be it.”

He made only the one doll house.

“I have six great-granddaughters,” Dehus said. “If I gave this one to one of them, I’d have to make five more.”

### **Doris Miller, 89**

Doris Miller grew up in Dayton and graduated from the former downtown Steele High School. She likes to tell people she was born in the present Miami Valley Hospital garage. In reality, that’s where the old MVH maternity wing was located.

She said she has been too busy in her life to marry and has pretty much worked all her life, learning how to sign at an early age as an only child to deaf parents.

“If I wanted something, like milk, I’d point,” Miller said. “My mother would then teach me the sign for milk.”

That experience eventually led Miller to develop the Sign Language curriculum at Sinclair in 1980, after she had already put in 27 years working for a group of physicians. She eventually retired from Sinclair in 1988, but decided she had to do something and began volunteering at MVH, starting in the neo-natal ward. She also has helped with patients who do not hear, and now she works once a week in the Foundation office.

“When I was much younger, I worked three days a week,” Miller said.

She has made two other concessions to age. Although she has made seven trips to Russia to help a church there, she says those long traveling days are over. She is also moving to a smaller home in Kettering after 61 years in the same house.

“I’m a little nervous about that,” Miller said. “You’d be surprised how much you collect over 61 years.”

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