

WINTER 2018

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# THE DORNSIFE CENTER CONNECTOR

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**WHAT WE**



*Ms. Cora Conyers, DCAC member*

**MAY BE**

## DIRECTOR'S WELCOME

Dear friends, participants, and neighbors,

The Dornsife Center aims to be a welcoming place for all, and we are grateful for the creative and vibrant senior citizens who bring our buildings to life every day and who contribute in dozens of ways to building this inclusive community resource.

Our elder community members share neighborhood histories as they lead the way to an exciting shared future. Senior citizens have been enthusiastic Dornsife Center program participants and leaders of our community planning processes from the start, and we are all honored and humbled by their shared commitment to their families and neighbors.

In this issue you will read about what some of our neighborhood seniors are up to at the Dornsife Center, and about the ideas they bring to the table. We hope you will find inspiration, and if you are a senior who hasn't yet tried out our programming, we invite you to join us. Keep warm this winter and we hope to see you soon.

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## STAFF SPOTLIGHT

<i>Name:</i>	Brenda Lewis
<i>Job:</i>	Lab Assistant for the Beachell Family Learning Center
<i>Hometown:</i>	Philadelphia: born and raised in Mantua!
<i>Current Residence:</i>	The Mantua neighborhood
<i>Favorite activity:</i>	Working at the Mantua Urban Peace Garden, growing vegetables and cooking them
<i>Favorite TV</i>	I love dramas on TV

*What is your role at the Dornsife Center?*

I work in the KEYSLOT computer lab, part of the Beachell Family Learning Center facilities. I assist those who need help in completing their projects, keep track of our attendance, and make sure the lab is run properly from day to day.

*Where can we find you at the Dornsife Center?*

The KEYSLOT is in the first floor of the Carriage House, room C107.

*What is your favorite thing about the Dornsife Center?*

Just meeting and helping people from all over the city. They come to take classes, look at their mail or whatever their need is, or just to get out of the house. We always connect.

*What do you do when you're not at the Dornsife Center?*

When I am not participating in community activities, I take on my responsibilities at church. I love to watch sports, spend time at my time share in Atlantic City, and I am beginning to love to travel.



## FROM WRITERS ROOM THE STAGES OF MY LIFE ROSALYN CLIETT

As we were traveling to our destination for the day, we passed by an open door of a theater. So my friend and I walked over to peek in, they were trying out stage set (scenery) for their play, so we watched. The first set was full of brightness, joy and fun with a sense of serenity. The next scenery seem to have an uncertainty about it, it was waves of mountains and valleys, light and dark, with different roads you could follow which causes some scary elements of the unknowing.

And my friend and I stayed to watch them set up one more scenery, this one started out casually slow, yet confident in the direction they was going. They set up a couple of trees, one a little sparsely in that it was not yet develop, and another one that looked more developed, different kinds of flowers, sunshine, and a park bench for someone to stop and collect themselves. It was a beautiful sight.

Then Suddenly a Loud Thunderous Noise and the sound of rain that not only scare us, but made us very curious to what was happening next. Then there was spirals of colors moving like a whirlwind, some bright colors, some not so bright, some even dark and they had the tendency to interact with one another, and when you would hear the sound of the wind they would separate. One of the spirals of color (Not So bright), would start to move so fast and would spiral up like fireworks and then a very loud burst of color would start to twinkling down like stars covering the stage; then the next spiral of color (Dark), then the next (Bright). When the storm was over the stage would go completely black... Slowly the sun would start to lighten the stage, until you could see the park. I notice the tree that seemed more developed looked disheveled, split in half because it didn't have much flexibility, but the tree that was a little sparsely, was standing strong, because it was flexible enough to bend and recover...

It was then I realized I was watching my life, as it played out before me. The First Scenery was from my early years, My

Childhood of 5yrs of age until, The Second Scenery, My Preteens & Teen years. And the state of being uncertain, doubtful, and hesitant with limited knowledge. And the Last one covered being a Young Women to Womanhood. Showing the world winds of life's changes. I left that day feeling a sense of Gratefulness to God for all he brought me through and for making me flexible enough to Bend and Snap back in place, a better place then I started out in.

P.S. Life can throw you a bunch of lemons, "But God" will help you to make Lemonade...



Rosalyn Cliett is a native resident of Philadelphia who loves to write and do anything creative. "I came to Dornsife to use the computers at KEYSLOT. Writers Room and the Side-by-Side course Philadelphia Stories are not only exciting, they are stretching me—and both are essential to my destiny."

## MORE ABOUT WRITERS ROOM

Writers Room is a Drexel College of Arts and Sciences initiative at the Dornsife Center. Here, members of the Mantua, Powelton Village, and Drexel communities explore writing as a tool for learning and a mode of creative expression. Together, we are creating a shared story. Writers Room programs include writing workshops, Side-by-Side courses, and a range of special events. Everybody has a story to share and we invite you to share yours at Writers Room. For more information, visit us on the web at [writersroom.online](http://writersroom.online)

## HELMA WEEKS

## PRESERVING MOBILITY IN POWELTON VILLAGE

Long-time Powelton Village resident Helma Weeks has been part of the Dornsife Center's planning and creation from the start, having attended the stakeholder consensus workshop in 2013 that really got things started. She was drawn by the prospect of building stronger lines of communication between Drexel and the neighborhoods next to the University City campus. That idea has since come to fruition and she holds up her end of the bargain by participating in the Dornsife Community Advisory Council (DCAC) and by being a regular fixture at the monthly community dinners.

Ms. Weeks describes her role in her community as a preserver of Powelton Village's historic fabric. That responsibility includes protecting the neighborhood's architecture, but also rekindling the collaborative spirit that once existed between Powelton Village and Mantua. Through her involvement with the Dornsife Center, she has seen a fresh coming together between the two communities. In fact, she personally takes advantage of the space to talk with her Mantua-based neighbors on a regular basis.

She believes that the Dornsife Center's real strength lies in its programming. She knows people who take part in the dance classes and who have joined Writer's Room, and has appreciated the impacts those programs have had. She was a big fan of the Dornsife Center's book club and is looking forward to more such activities.

The commitment that Ms. Weeks brings to the Dornsife Center has also provided her with a new role that she's proud of: she has become a voice for seniors in her community. At the DCAC monthly meetings, she shares

the issues that are important to neighborhood seniors. Of particular concern to her is mobility - making sure that seniors can get where they need to go even when they don't have a car.

Ms. Weeks was in fact first attracted to Powelton Village because of how easy it was to get around in the neighborhood. She move to the neighborhood in 1968 and lived here until 1973. She returned in 1997 following her husband's death because she still had friends in the area, and because of the appeal of being able to ride a bike to work instead of spending more than an hour on the train each way. Her appreciation for Powelton Village's location, integration, architecture, and culture has continued to grow, and today her work with the Dornsife Center is part of the way she advances her advocacy and care for her community and its residents.



## MORE ABOUT DCAC

The Dornsife Community Advisory Council was created in 2013 following an intensive two-day consensus workshop that brought over 60 members of the Powelton Village and Mantua communities together to establish priorities for Dornsife Center programming. DCAC meets once a month with Dornsife Center staff to help keep programming grounded in community needs. Members of DCAC include senior citizens, residents of both Powelton Village and Mantua, young adults, Drexel students and faculty, and representatives of key stakeholder groups like the faith community and the nonprofit and city-based service sector. The Dornsife Center is currently seeking nominations for new members for DCAC and we invite you to contact us if you are interested in serving.



## MICHAEL STEWART

### A COMMITMENT TO LIFELONG LEARNING

The Dornsife Center represents different things to different people. It is a place of familial bonds, intergenerational friendships, and intellectual exchange. For 66-year-old Michael Stewart the center is the latter, which is why he takes part in programming every year.

Mr. Stewart has been involved with the Dornsife Center since 2013. He began his journey with a Side-by-Side urban agriculture course coordinated by Drexel's Lindy Center for Civic Engagement at The Enterprise Center. Excited to be back in the classroom as a student, he decided that he

would continue to take classes. In fact, he made a promise to himself that if he didn't enroll in a formal graduate program, he would use the Dornsife Center's classes and programs to keep his mind active. He has since been part of seven courses and is currently enrolled in his eighth. The courses have covered topics like health promotion, the history of Philadelphia, public speaking, fashion culture, youth and society, and more, all of which have been related to his interests in one way or another.

Mr. Stewart appreciates being able to find programs that align with his interests because it leads him to like-minded people who are equally excited about learning. Class discussions have spiraled into friendships with people of different races, ages, and occupations. He has even taken the time to connect personally with his professors. He speaks highly of Alexis Finger, a Drexel teaching professor in the Department of English and Philosophy, who led the Readers Theater program at the Dornsife Center. They have remained connected beyond the program's ending. Readers Theater, Mr. Stewart felt, gave

him access to what he considered a timely performance. Participants performed a play titled *Better to Light a Candle Than to Curse the Darkness*, which addressed the challenges of overcoming oppression both as individuals and collectively.

Besides the invitation into Drexel's network of knowledge resources that has come from participating in programming at the Dornsife Center, Mr. Stewart also appreciates the flexibility of the programs. He can still take part in his other activities around teaching and tutoring,

and then come to class at the Dornsife Center. However, he once had to remove himself from a course because of conflicting work obligations and he appreciated the professor's understanding and reassurance that everything would be OK - and it was. He was happy to be welcomed back into the next course he signed up for.

Ever since, Mr. Stewart has taken at least one of the Dornsife Center's Side-by-Side courses each year

and has completed all of them. To him there is nothing more valuable than education. He considers himself fortunate to be in a position to learn from young people who are willing to teach him as well.

It's the people, the location, and the welcoming environment that keeps Mr. Stewart coming back. This former Powelton Village resident considers the Dornsife Center a place where he is always welcome. He looks forward to getting into more courses, and another Astronomy Night. So, if you see Mr. Stewart around - especially if you're a lover of science - be sure to say hello!



*Michael Stewart, center, attends a Side-by-Side class at the Dornsife Center*

### MORE ABOUT SIDE-BY-SIDE

During the fall, winter, and spring terms, Drexel's Lindy Center for Civic Engagement brings Drexel coursework to the Dornsife Center. In a Side-by-Side course, neighborhood residents can take a seat beside Drexel undergraduates and become community students - doing the reading, listening to lectures, completing assignments, and taking the exams. Side-by-Side courses are offered at no cost to community students, and the topics vary widely. Past courses have been in fields like history, literature, communications, philosophy, and culinary arts. Look out for course announcements in the Dornsife Center email newsletters or pick up a flyer on-site.

# DORNSIFE CENTER SENIOR GROUP WELCOMES YOU

We caught up with a meeting of the Dornsife Center senior group recently, as they met with Drexel's Dr. Florence Gelo to talk about some of the health impacts of stress. The Dornsife Center's Community Wellness HUB arranged the gathering, recognizing that life as a senior citizen often brings with it a unique set of stressful circumstances.

Dr. Gelo is the behavioral science faculty member at the Drexel University, College of Medicine, family medicine residency program. This was her first-time meeting with the senior group. As she notes, "what struck me is that it is such a warm group of people who are interested in issues that are vital to their day-to-day lives. Everybody was ready to talk about things that matter, and we were able to create a little togetherness for that hour."

create community in a deeper sense is so valuable. In this group you can participate and share stories and be uplifted, learn new things and feel like you have a place to talk about what's important, and it's safe. Seniors can share realities that are relevant."

The group also had a chance to talk with Drexel students in the College of Nursing & Health Profession's physical therapy program about how we can tailor programming around health and mobility. Being able to keep moving safely - maintaining balance and flexibility, safely going up and down stairs in our city rowhouses, navigating cracked sidewalks and uneven streets - these are key to living independently, and the senior group members shared their ideas with students to help shape programming.



*The senior group talks with Dr. Florence Gelo*

Dr. Gelo thinks that this sense of togetherness happens because everyone in the senior group contributes with openness and a willingness to share experiences. That is important, she says: "First of all, senior life is not easy, and the fact that you can rely on this group to

Members of the senior group say that they want to keep building their community, and welcome any other seniors interested in joining them. Ms. Valda Brown observes, "when I look at our group it's people in our community. Some are retired, some enjoy doing community service, and I would love to work with other seniors still in the professional world."

Mr. Earl Hackett comes to the senior group, and he is also an active participant in Writers Room. To him, sharing stories is essential. "I'm in a unique position as a writer and a blogger and as a senior. We have so much life experience that we can pass on but the thing is you have to write it down."

And according to Ms. Ethel Tindal, "one of the positive things about this group is getting to know people in our community - getting to know them and what they are going through and how we can help one another." Sharing friendship and support is what the senior group is all about.

## MORE ABOUT THE DORNSIFE SENIOR GROUP

The Dornsife Center's Senior Group is an opportunity for residents from all around West Philadelphia to plan intergenerational activities to build relationships and share mutual support. Each meeting offers special programs that focus on topics like health and wellbeing, exercise, nutrition, and digital literacy. We talk, dance, cook, and garden together. Upcoming meeting dates are February 23, March 16, April 20, May 18, and June 15. Meetings always start at 11:00 a.m., and we always serve snacks.



**DornsifeSeniorGroup**



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