

SENIOR LIVING

Kirkwood residents gather by the fire and enjoy the billiards room.



“We fell in love with the place. It was perfect for us.”

—VIVIEN HARMON



Senior Living

Where life in the slow lane isn't slow at all.

BY JUNE MATHEWS

A few years ago, Vivien and Jim Harmon visited Kirkwood By the River with an eye toward moving there. They were not only bowled over by the beauty of its setting near the Cahaba River, but they also appreciated its amenities and activities.

“We fell in love with the place,” Mrs. Harmon says. “It was perfect for us.”

Their one misgiving was the prospect of leaving Point Clear, Alabama, where they had been enjoying retirement for 20-plus years.

“It was a great place to live,” she says. “We were on a golf course, so we played a lot of golf and a lot of bridge, and we spent time at our beach place in Destin. We had a great life.”

But once the Harmons factored in the need to live closer to their two sons and other family members, they realized moving to Birmingham was the wisest course. So, they packed up their belongings and their many fond memories of Point Clear and headed north.

Eight months later, Mrs. Harmon was grateful for the decision to make Kirkwood their home when, in early 2022, Mr. Harmon passed away. They had been married for 64 years.

If not for the nearness of her children and an outpouring of care and concern by the many friends the Harmons had made in their new senior living community, the difficulties inherent in the loss of a spouse would have been that much more difficult for Mrs. Harmon.

“When Jim died, I had a lot of people here who helped give me the kind of support I needed at a time like that,” she says. “And it

was really nice for me to have our children here when that happened.”

As time went by, Mrs. Harmon settled into her life, often by leaning into the friendships she formed at Kirkwood and the activities available to the residents to help them learn, grow healthier and just enjoy.

“I’ve made a lot of friends here,” she says. “It’s a very warm and friendly place.”

To anyone unaccustomed to Kirkwood’s activities schedule, it might seem overwhelming. But Mrs. Harmon keeps a steady pace with exercise classes, balance classes, programs featuring music and/or speakers and games.

“We play an awful lot of games,” she says. “We have Bingo, Bunco, Mexican Train dominoes, Hand and Foot Canasta and Bridge. I was primarily a Bridge player, but I’ve learned to do a lot else since I got here. We’re also taking up Mahjong, and we have a library. It’s amazing how many books we have in there.”

Residents of Kirkwood additionally enjoy regular access to hairstylists, pedicurists, manicurists, podiatric care, audiological evaluations and transportation to shopping venues, doctor visits and dental appointments.

“I don’t know how all that compares with other places because I haven’t tried to compare it, but I feel like we’re pretty well covered with anything we want,” Mrs. Harmon says.

The mother of two and grandmother of six, with two great-grandchildren on the way, Mrs. Harmon will turn 89 in May.

“I can’t believe I’m about to be 90, but I’m in fairly good health, which is really good,” she says.

Longleaf Liberty Park resident Bob Black, age 92, is also in decent health. Unfortunately, however, his wife Martha is not, so Black needed help caring for her. That’s what led them to search for an assisted living facility.

“She’s got some problems with her strength,” says Black. “She has trouble standing up and walking. Since I push around her wheelchair all day, I’m still in pretty good shape physically, and I guess mentally. But she needs help getting dressed and things like that. They do a good job here at Longleaf taking care of all that.”

The staff at Longleaf, says Black, is incredible.

“That’s key to any senior living facility,” he says. “They take good care of us. As far as activities, there’s something going on here all the time.”

Some of the activities the Blacks particularly enjoy are concerts, Bingo twice a week and weekday happy hours, when they can go to the lounge and enjoy a glass or two of wine. They also enjoy the meals, since the food is what Black considers “excellent.”

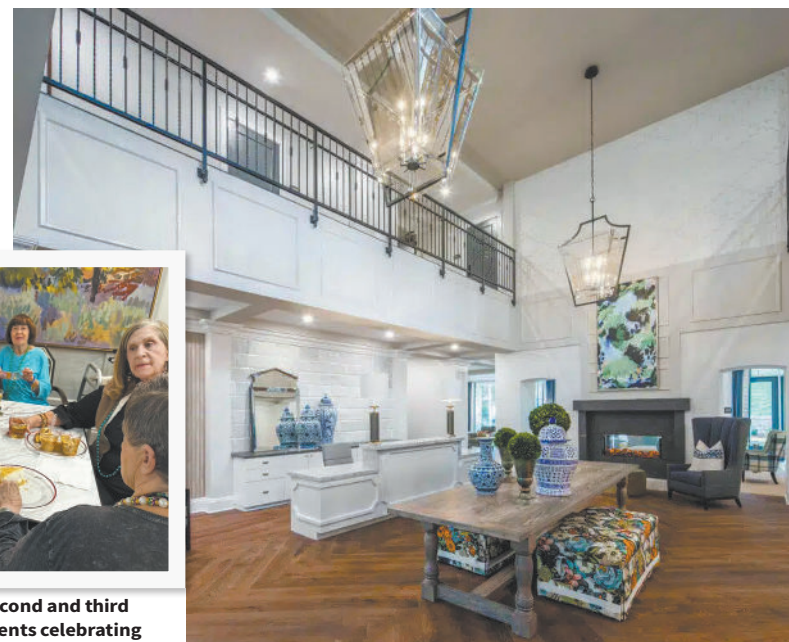
“We also enjoy our suite, which has a big living area, a nice bedroom and a huge bath with a walk-in shower.”

The Blacks checked on about a half dozen other places before opting for Longleaf.

“They were all good, but Longleaf seemed special. We’ve made friends with everybody here and consider them family,” he says.

Married for 70 years, the Blacks have four children, 10 grandchildren, and 11 great-grandchildren. They keep “Bob and Martha” busy entertaining weekly.

“Longleaf is a wonderful place,” says Black. “We’ve thoroughly enjoyed being here, and we feel quite happy being in a community. We can’t recommend Longleaf any higher than that.” **OTM**



Martha and Bob Black (second and third from left), and fellow residents celebrating Mardi Gras at Longleaf.