

## TLC Manor PCH Graduates PEERs

TLC Manor Personal Care Home, Brisbin, recently graduated nine PEERs. PEERs are Pennsylvania's Empowered Expert Residents who act as advocates for themselves and for their fellow peers within long-term care facilities. Participating residents included Virginia Adams, Ida Bowman, Anna Mae Hodge, Vera Lipnicky, Frances Orwick, Rebecca Phillips, Clara Simmers, Katherine Tobachak and Grace Wojtowich. Training was conducted by ombudsman Jeanne Urban from the Clearfield County Area Agency on Aging, Inc.



*TLC Manor Personal Care Home, Brisbin, recently graduated nine PEERs. Pictured are (l-r) front row: Anna Mae Hodge, Virginia Adams, Rebecca Phillips (second row) Frances Orwick, Grace Wojtowich, Ida Bowman, Katherine Tobachak, Clara Simmers, (third row) Wilmarie Gonzalez, PA State Long-Term Care Ombudsman, and Jeanne Urban, Clearfield County Area Agency on Aging Staff Ombudsman. Missing from the photo is Vera Lipnicky.*

The PEER Project is a partnership of residents, staff, facility administrators, and ombudsmen. The project encourages these shareholders to work together within the facility to resolve concerns before they become more intense problems. The PEER Project trains residents as advocates to enhance the quality of care and the quality of life inside the facility, making a difference one resident at a time.

PEER was initiated by the Pennsylvania State Ombudsman Office in 2002 in Cambria County. The project was quick to catch on statewide, and there are now over 1100 PEERs in 150 facilities throughout Pennsylvania. Several other states have adapted the concept, including Maryland, Michigan, New Jersey, and Texas.

Participants in the PEER Project attended five, two-hour training sessions, which validated individuals' worth and usefulness, no matter what their ages. PEER training capitalizes on the residents' experiences and utilizes their life-skills and problem solving abilities. In addition, there was also a special session for facility staff to orient them to the concept and provide a "buy in" to support the residents during their training.

For the graduation ceremony, PEERs hosted family members and staff at an afternoon tea with sandwiches, cookies, and punch. PA State Long-Term Care Ombudsman, Wilmarie Gonzales, made the trip from Harrisburg to attend the ceremony and address the group. She complimented them on their dedication and underscored the valuable difference PEERs make across the state. She pointed out that PEER groups have now been established in 52 of the 67 counties in Pennsylvania. Each PEER was capped and received their tassels as a keepsake of the event. For several, this was the first graduation they attended. Graduates were also awarded a certificate, a door sign to assist fellow residents in locating the advocates, and a badge with a starfish logo identifying them as PEERs and acknowledging that they can make a difference.

Following graduation, PEERs will fulfill several roles. They will welcome new residents and help them become familiar with the facility, residents, and staff. They will share information on resident rights. They will participate in and invite other residents to participate in Resident Councils. They will encourage residents to express their preferences and to work together for resolutions. They will work with the facility administrator and staff members, as well as with ombudsmen, when they have questions or need assistance. Finally and most importantly, they will listen to their peers.

For more information on the PEER Project, interested residents or facilities should contact the Clearfield County Area Agency on Aging, Inc. at 765-2696 or 1-800-225-8571.