

# GROWING ENTHUSIASMS

*It's been a busy summer season indoors and out at Middleton Hall Retirement Village*

**H**igh summer has been a busy and entertaining time for residents and families of Middleton Hall Retirement Village, in Middleton St George, near Darlington, with everything from Friday evening drinks and a summer barbecue on the Orangery terrace to Hawaiian, Italian and Greek-themed dining in the restaurant, plus live music and visiting speakers. On top of all that, there have also been the village's regular sessions that include bridge, pottery, table tennis, cinema nights, exercise classes and trips to local attractions.

The award-winning 45-acre estate also opened to the public again in August as part of this year's National Open Garden Scheme, when visitors were able to explore the extensive private grounds. There is plenty on offer for garden-lovers here, with a mix of traditional formal gardens combined with themed areas, such as Japanese planting, Mediterranean and butterfly gardens, as well as a vibrant collection of community allotments tended by village residents. A new ceramic garden was finished earlier this summer featuring a display of work created by the Middleton Hall Retirement Village Ceramics group.

Class regular Joan Metcalfe, who lives in the village's independent retirement housing in The Waterside, explains why she enjoyed attending the class and the inspiration behind one of the garden's striking artworks. "I've always enjoyed art and enjoy painting in oils, I find it very therapeutic. I've found similar benefits to working with ceramics, the only

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Visitors enjoy a tour of the grounds



Susan Bell

difference is it's more sociable. I can chat while I work," she says. "We decided to create a ceramic totem pole after watching them making one on Channel 4's *The Great Pottery Throw Down*. We were all chatting and saying what a good idea it was, so we thought, why don't we have a go?"

The grounds are an important aspect of living at the retirement village for one of Joan's neighbours, Susan Bell. A keen naturalist, Susan looks after a buddleia bed on The Waterside. "I am keen to encourage bees and butterflies and I also have range of visitors to the feeding station close to our home, from roe deer to a family of grey partridge."

Susan's love of the natural world extends beyond the estate boundaries with daily forays to the lanes around Middleton St George to litter pick. This is a continuation of a lifelong commitment to contributing to community life wherever she lives. In 2021, Susan was selected as a Paul Harris Fellow in recognition of her past services, including being a councillor, involvement in Alnwick in Bloom, and voluntary work with Alnwick Rotary International, before her move to Middleton Hall Retirement Village.

"The catalyst for me to keep litter-picking is to help ensure nature remains intact and unspoilt and there is the added bonus of being able to spend time outdoors," she says. "It also keeps me active, as does living here as it is a great place to get involved with a range of activities."



The ceramics group



The Estates team

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