

IT WAS so lovely to be back in the home once more, with that warm feeling and welcoming atmosphere. And it was extra special to be close to Mum again and to hold her hand. We couldn't stop chatting – and how we laughed!"

This comment from one family member is typical of your welcome to the new visiting arrangements, which started this week and allow many more of you to get close to your loved ones inside the homes. Now, two named individuals can visit each resident inside. And although it's necessary for folk to take a lateral flow test for Covid-19 and to wear PPE, most who are visiting judge it worth all the inconvenience.

It is still possible to visit in the garden gazebos, where tests are not necessary, though social distancing must be observed. As the weather gets warmer, this may become an increasingly attractive option. One area, however, where you may be disappointed is in the new regulations governing trips out of the homes. Some of you have been asking whether we can bend the rules on this.

However, the Department of Health and Social Care have issued a strict policy, which we must abide by, saying that while such trips are permissible, there is a very important proviso that any resident making a visit out of the home should isolate for 14 days on their return.

This is to ensure that – in the event they have unknowingly become infected while out of the home – they minimise the chances of passing that infection on to other residents and staff.

In addition, family members accompanying the resident out of the home must take a lateral flow test for Covid-19 immediately before the outing, as must the resident concerned. If any of the tests are positive, the trip cannot go ahead.

We're sorry if these rules seem tough. The Department of Health say: "We recognise that in practice, this is likely to mean that many residents will not wish to make a visit out of the home."

They advise: "In many cases, holding visits in the care home will be the safer, more convenient and preferable way of residents spending time with family and friends. We would encourage residents to take this approach, particularly given the increasing range of opportunities to do so."

Indeed, the atmosphere within the homes is especially inviting at the moment. It's always a treat to study the lively weekly activities planners, with their witty pictograms, published each week by Eirlys, our activities manager. From balloon volleyball to carpet bowls and arts and crafts to quizzes, there literally isn't a moment in the day when there's not a great opportunity for entertaining things to do.

One of the pursuits folk are particularly enjoying at the moment is Book Club – which doesn't just appeal to literary types – the focus is on a work that everyone can enjoy. At Spring Grove, for instance they are enthralled by *The Kind Worth Killing*, a psychological thriller by Peter Swanson, set in London and Boston. And it's quite saucy, too, we're told!

Music is also a treat for lively minds. This week's live-streamed "Music with Love" recital from the English Sinfonia, performed by Janice Graham on violin, Chris Hopkins on piano and Julia Graham on cello, was a gem. Next Wednesday we're looking forward to a concert by "Vivacious Violins". You can tune in from home at <https://www.artistsandresidents.org/>

There are plenty of activities that are not cerebral, though. Last Sunday residents enjoyed sharing some lovely memories of their pets for National Pet Day. There were many fond feline and canine recollections – as well as those of other much-loved companions, too.

With the Queen's Birthday coming up on April 21, and the thoughts of the nation on the Royal Family after the passing of the Duke of Edinburgh, there is something of a royal theme in the homes this week. (And there's St George's Day, too, which we are celebrating on April 23.)

At Spring Lane, Magda has been hard at work decorating the home to celebrate "Royal Britain", and at Spring Grove one of our residents, the Rev Linda Dean, is organising a home-made card as well as raising money for charity to mark Her Majesty's 95th. Some splendid-sounding tea parties are also being organised so everyone can tuck in, too.

Over at Springview, our oldest resident, Gladys Gathergood, will be 108 on the Queen's birthday – and Gladys will definitely be our Queen for the day. Happy birthday, Gladys, and many happy returns, also, to Pamela Brightling at Spring Lane, who turned 97 last week. Pamela's son Jon made her a beautiful walnut and coffee cake, which was absolutely delicious (see picture below).



Our bakers have been busy again, with our Great Springdene Bake Off going into its latest round. The new challenge was "chocolate nests", as everybody had just celebrated Easter weekend. No specific recipe was given this time, so the homes had complete control over how they wanted to make and display them.

They were pretty impressive as a result. Springview and Spring Lane went for duck-themed decorations when displaying their finished product while Spring Grove opted for a very creative "Willy Wonka's World" for its display, which was incredibly inventive! One home kept things simple, with creamy milk chocolate, and crispy orange eggs, while another used dark chocolate and a little tang from dried cranberries, as well as hand rolling some fudge eggs to top their treats.

As Eirlys, our chief judge, put it: "The Willy Wonka ones were nothing less than what you'd expect to come out of one of his factories! They contained Oreos, pecans, mini-marshmallows, mini-eggs – you name it they've got it in there! Quite the indulgence!"

Judging, as always, was tough, with so much flavour and texture for our taster – operations assistant Theodore – to chew over. In the end, Springview emerged the winner. That makes the competition a tie so far, with 20 points for each of the homes. Well done, bakers – looking forward to the next magical confections!



While on the subject of cakes, family member Ondine Upton, daughter of Eve Upton at Spring Grove has sent us this charming photograph of her mother (above) on her wedding day. It prompted us to ask whether you would like to send in photos of your own loved ones in their heyday. (And, yes, says Ondine, that is a sword being used to cut the cake!) We'd like to post the pictures in a special display in the lobbies. Please email any examples you have to mwilliams@springdene.co.uk. We'd love to hear from you! Every picture will be acknowledged.

With life returning closer to normality, our charitable activities are getting into gear again, with our signature sponsored walks once more on the horizon. We're delighted to report that Springview has raised the gargantuan sum of £43,000 for Medical Detection Dogs, our nominated charity. Thanks to everybody who attended Kathy's legendary fish 'n' chip

quiz suppers (which flourished before the pandemic), bought raffle tickets, and joined in the walks.

Now attention is focusing on a new charity – the Sepsis Trust, which raises money for research into this life-threatening condition which can kill within days and yet is treatable if caught in time.

“We chose the cause,” says our fundraiser Kathy Cleveland Dunn, “because the son of one of our families recently died from sepsis, and we want to raise awareness of the condition.” We’ll shortly be announcing some cash-building activities and we know you will dig deep for this charity, which is in the great tradition of Springdene fundraising.

Lastly, we celebrate our residents of the week. Franco Iannacone at Spring Grove hails from Tuscany. A former hotel manager, tour guide and chef, he is a nifty dancer and will be enjoying pannetone dipped in white wine as his treat. Patricia Dean at Spring Lane has a wonderful smile and laugh, and is enjoying her flowers and chocolates.

At Springview, Nora Richardson is a quiet lady, but loves singing the old pub songs and watching romantic movies. She adores chocolate cake, so will be getting plenty of that. Congratulations, and all the very best to each of these special people!
