

## Former Librarian, 86, finds Purpose as Senior Living Community's Volunteer Librarian



By Kasey Brennan

Elaine Gilliam, 86, has found purpose in her retirement at The Watermark at Vistawilla, the senior living community where she lives. For the last two years, Gilliam has served as the volunteer librarian managing the community's growing library of books. The role is one she's familiar with, as she spent more than 30 years as a librarian in her home state of Ohio.

The community will honor Elaine on National Librarian Day, which is celebrated on April 16, during a meet and greet with author Rita Katz - who wrote the book "The ABCs of Aging" - at 2:00 p.m. Elaine will be recognized for her work in the community's library before Katz reads excerpts of her book and signs copies for residents. The community will also hold a book swap, where residents can donate books or exchange books with the library.

"For seniors like Elaine, having a purpose can do wonders for their overall health and wellbeing," said Kimberly Dike, community life director at The Watermark at Vistawilla. "We encourage all our residents to pursue their passions, and Elaine is a shining example of how the past and present can come together to create a beautiful life in retirement."

For Gilliam, her path to becoming a librarian was mere happenstance.

"At the time, I was working at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio and there was an open position in the library," said Gilliam. "My supervisor asked me to take on the job, and I obliged."

She spent more than 30 years in the role. While working for the Army, she also spent time in Washington D.C. serving under the Defense Intelligence Agency. More than 10 years later, the opportunity to serve as a librarian presented itself again - and again, she accepted.

Shortly after moving to The Watermark at Vistawilla, Dike approached her about managing the community's library. She had heard of Gilliam's extensive background and thought it might be a good opportunity for her to shine. Since then, Gilliam has meticulously cataloged the books in the library and created a system to better support the community.

Her system includes a detailed spreadsheet and binder that allows residents to easily find their favorite books and request books that are not part of the collection.

"It gives me purpose," Gilliam explained. "And I love knowing exactly what books we have on the shelves."

Thanks to her efforts, the library has experienced significant growth. Two new bookshelves have been added to the room, and another is on the way to accommodate the ever-expanding collection. Residents are also actively engaged, enjoying the books and steadily requesting a selection of new titles.

"Elaine has had a lasting impact on our community," said Dike. "Her passion has had a ripple effect and has brought out our readers and book lovers who are now using the library. The library is now a vibrant part of our community, and we have Elaine to thank for that."