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Michele Tarsitano-Amato

Michele started working at Kendal in August 1993 after obtaining an M.A. in Art Therapy from Ursuline College. She became board-certified in art therapy in 1995, and then in 2007 became a board-certified dementia practitioner. Michele oversees the Creative Arts Therapy program for the Stephens Care Center and is a strong supporter of intergenerational activities. She works closely with the Bonner Center for Service and Learning at Oberlin College and Kendal Early Learning to engage both the college students and our young children with the Stephens Care Center. This year we are being honored by the Bonner Center as “Community Partner of the Year,” due in no small part to her hard work and dedication.

She has still made time for a private life, and in 1996 married Mike Amato, a home-health RN. Both of Michele’s children, Mikey and Angie, were part of Kendal from the beginning. They attended Kendal Early Learning Center, and have continued to volunteer to help their mother as well as performing in Kendal productions. Even her dog Amber gets in on the act, serving as Kendal's therapy dog three days a week. Resident Fran Cooper helps guide Amber to those needing support.

Michele was a founder of AOPHA’s art and writing contest, believing that “everyone can experience enhancement of self through the arts.” She serves on the state board and gives workshops and seminars on art therapy to help train the next generation.

The Quaker philosophy of community and mutual respect is the cornerstone of how she works with and treats people. Michele is thankful that she has been encouraged to push boundaries and not just have a program like all the others. She is also proud that we now have our own kiln thanks to the craft sale profits of resident-made crafts.

Looking back to Kendal's early days, her favorite memory is the camaraderie and how everyone – residents and staff – joined together for lunch and laughter as they learned their way. Looking ahead, her advice is to shake things up, have staff experience each other's sites and practices to regain the excitement of a start-up. She would like Kendal to be more of a destination so that folks could "try it" for longer visits. We can build on being in a neat, artsy town that people want to come see and get involved with.

Michele loves working here, where she has been able to grow as an individual as well as a professional. It is her extended family. As Mike says, Kendal is her first-born. You can take Michele out of Kendal but never Kendal out of her.

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