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# THE GOOD LIFE

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## Aging, Community, and the Power of Podcasting

*By Jason Molony,**MSW, Age & Dementia Friendly Program Director*

Jason Molony

In our Age Friendly communities, the voices of local older adults matter—and it matters that they are heard. These voices are treasures of wisdom, experience, and insight. And with over 20,000 people over the age of 65 in Franklin County, that's a lot of voices. And boy, do they have stories to tell.

But how to get those voices out into the world? There are lots of ways. Local older adults contribute widely across all mediums—fine art, writing, dance, and lectures, to name a few. In addition, since the fall of 2023, the perspectives of Franklin County's older adults can be heard on virtually any device across the world directly from the studios of Greenfield Community College, with the launch of the *Backyard Oasis* podcast (<https://engage.gcc.mass.edu/seniors/podcast/>).

The name *Backyard Oasis* hints at what to expect. Greenfield Community College, a regional leader in lifelong learning, established Older Adults Seeking, Inspiring, and Serving (OASIS) to further engage older adult learners who have long been a core of the GCC student body. According to Judy Raper, Associate Dean of Community Engagement at Greenfield Community College and *Backyard Oasis* founder, "Franklin County is home to a remarkable community of older adults whose intelligence, enthusiasm, and life experience enrich GCC in countless ways. OASIS was created to ensure we not only support their continued learning but also benefit from the valuable insights they have to share." "Backyard" evokes a setting: comfortable, familiar, inviting—but perhaps most importantly, the podcast is conceived by, run by, and for local older adults.

Following a silky-smooth introduction by career radio personality Dennis Lee, *Backyard Oasis* hosts skillfully guide novice and seasoned guests alike through thoughtful, reflective conversations about their experiences and areas of expertise, organized around the theme of aging. These are conversations, not promotions, as host Denise Schwartz reminded me when she and I sat down to reflect on Age & Dementia Friendly Communities.

Denise sees her role as host as a chance to grow by connecting with guests: "These are wonderful people who have something to say, who give their time to

talk." She adds, "I've learned so much from them—how to stop a bleed, what death doulas do, local efforts to reduce substance use disorder, dancing for health and happiness, finding joy in a new place, planting gardens for pollinators, why we don't see insects on our windshields anymore, how authors write and why, how pickleball saved the lives of two people 30 years apart, adapting yoga for aging bodies, how older adults can use their voices to build community, how to build joy into your life, how to keep going."

With over 60 episodes—some downloaded hundreds of times—the popularity of the *Backyard Oasis* podcast speaks for itself. Listeners tell Judy, "Whether I'm seeking guidance on aging gracefully, discovering inspiring stories from people in our community, or enjoying meaningful intergenerational conversations, *Backyard Oasis* always has something valuable to offer."

Haven't listened to a podcast yet? You should! They're easily accessible from nearly any computer or mobile device and open the door to a world of spoken audio



Guests and the *Backyard Oasis* production team celebrate 50 episodes. From left: Dan Conlon, Denise Schwartz, Judy Raper, Bela Breslau, Meg Ryan, and Alex Audette.  
Photo credit: Chris Larabee/Greenfield Recorder

content on every topic imaginable. It's no surprise that podcasts have surged in popularity in recent years—according to Pew Research, more than 40% of U.S. adults now report listening to podcasts regularly. If you're new to podcasts, getting started is simple—here's a quick beginner's guide to help you dive in: [www.thepodcasthost.com/listening/how-to-listen-to-a-podcast/](http://www.thepodcasthost.com/listening/how-to-listen-to-a-podcast/). Think of podcasts as you would radio—but on demand, and with more voices than ever before.

As interest in *Backyard Oasis* grew, new hosts joined the effort: Dennis Lee, Christine Copeland, and Chad Fuller. What they all share is a desire to lift the voices of local older adults—to inform, engage, and share their perspectives. Reflecting on her experience, Denise Schwartz says, "I saw it as a way to give older adults opportunities to express what they know and feel, talk about their various endeavors, their thoughts, ideas, accomplishments. Older adults often feel invisible, and I saw this as a way to help reframe aging."

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## Scam Alert!

### Government & Business Imposter Scams



**They say they want to help, but they just want to steal your money!**

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