

Reprinted from **County Lines**  
August 2009



## Living the Good Life

Carol Metzker

*As a young chemist, Aaron Martin never dreamed there would be a student-staffed lollipop factory in his future.*

*Mary Beth Drobish didn't envision a menagerie that included pygmy goats and Geronimo the appaloosa.*

*And Jay Malthaner hardly imagined post-retirement would find him on scaffolding next to a dilapidated home.*

Each of these three Chester County residents, however, has transformed personal success into enriching experiences for other people. All three have contributed time, talents and their retirement to improve the lives of thousands of community neighbors. And all three insist that they are the lucky ones. Here's how each of them has found how to live the Good Life.

### **Aaron Martin: Oh, Lolli, Lollipop!**

According to Aaron Martin, there's more to a package of lollipops than meets the eye. In fact, there are more opportunities for learning through candy than you can shake a lollipop stick at. And the octogenarian has the stories to prove it.

A decade ago, Aaron became the first treasurer for After the Bell, a program

founded to provide fun and safe after-school learning experiences for Kennett-area middle school students. "I was also a mentor for the program's study hall, called Brain Base, where kids could bring homework challenges," Aaron recounted.

His most colorful After the Bell activity, however, was one that captured the attention and taste buds of youngsters: a simulated lollipop factory.

"When we started, we asked the kids to fill out an application for employment," explained Aaron. "Another teacher and I talked about corporate structure. Then the group elected a president for the day who would assign responsibilities to employees."

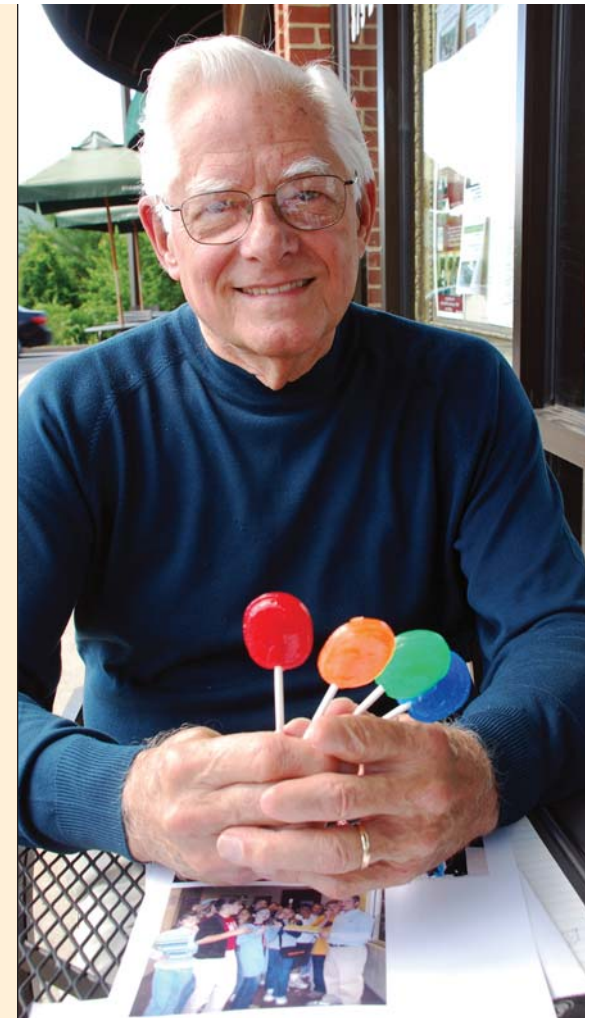
Those tasks included measuring ingredients into a kettle, monitoring the temperature of the mixture, oiling lollipop molds, and packaging finished products. Each step provided an opportunity for education. Group decisions on lollipop colors, flavors and shapes offered experiences for practicing cooperation by students from diverse ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds.

Students sold their wares at lunch the next school day. As a follow-up, Aaron taught them about revenue, expenses and profit.

Results of the factory — in addition to lollipops resembling violet birds and red turtles — included business skills, safety and hygiene principles, and early exposure to philanthropy. Students donated profits to organizations such as Tick Tock, an early learning center for disadvantaged families.

The project was a triumph. The kids, literally and figuratively, ate it up! "The kids would say funny things like, 'This is a sweet project,'" said Aaron with a laugh. "Sometimes they'd mess up a few lollipops to eat their mistakes."

Lollipop factory simulations continue each year at After the Bell, although Aaron has moved on to other



**Aaron Martin started a lollipop factory to teach kids about business.**

community projects. "I get great satisfaction seeing these things take on a life of their own and prosper," he said.

The long list of his accomplishments is astounding and inspiring. The retired DuPont research chemist and co-founder of F&M Scientific Corporation has devoted time and expertise to the Bayard Taylor Memorial Library, Kennett Symphony, Kennett Run Charities and many other area groups. For a lifetime of philanthropic leadership, Aaron Martin earned the 2003 Jordan Award from Chester County Community Foundation.

Which project is he most proud of? "I'm proud of all of them!" he asserted.



Mary Beth Drobish's menagerie now includes a full-sized thoroughbred, five miniature horses, goats, Spronk the sheep, miniature donkeys Bert and Ernie, Cotton the rabbit, and black cats Slinky and TicTac.

### **Mary Beth Drobish: An Open Barn Door**

One sunny day in 2004, Mary Beth Drobish had a flash of insight. She grabbed a pen, and — gazing out her kitchen window at the bucolic Chester County scenery — sketched plans for a barn on a paper towel.

Not just any barn, however. A barn with wheelchair-accessible hayloft and entrances. A place where special children and animals could interact.

That paper towel drawing changed her life.

Ten years earlier, Mary Beth and her husband Bob had bought a small West Chester farm with a 200-year-old house. “It was to be our retirement home,” she said. But her plans were shattered when Bob passed away suddenly in 2003. Their children were in college, and Mary Beth’s grief was deep.

“One day, I walked up to a shed to see my 31-year-old Arabian mare, Aziza,” Mary Beth said. “I put my arms around her neck. I asked her, ‘What am I going to do?’ It was as though she said, ‘Build a barn.’”

Goosebumps replaced Mary Beth’s sadness as she drew designs. “Thinking about all the exciting possibilities, I couldn’t sleep that night,” she continued. The next day, she called an architect. Within a week, he had visited the farm.

Mary Beth never dreamed how far her project would surpass her paper towel plans. In only a few years, The Barn at Springbrook Farm became a reality and a roaring success. Last year alone, the Barn provided animal-assisted activities for more than 500 children with disabilities.

Physically-challenged toddlers exercise weak muscles as they follow pygmy goats. Autistic children address tactile problems while brushing Cotton, a French Angora rabbit. Youngsters in wheelchairs take Dreamer, a miniature horse, for walks. Although Mary Beth and her staff design sessions geared to meet each individual child’s needs, having fun is the first and foremost goal of every Barn activity.

Mary Beth’s menagerie now includes a full-sized thoroughbred, five miniature horses, goats, Spronk the sheep,

miniature donkeys Bert and Ernie, Cotton the rabbit, and black cats Slinky and TicTac. Each animal is carefully selected, Mary Beth emphasized. Each of these animals will wear a halter and can be walked by a child in a wheelchair.

Interactions among the animals and children have produced many strong bonds and small miracles. At the Barn, a young boy with speech delays put together his first sentence to talk about a cow. A physically-challenged little girl took her first steps to reach a miniature horse. Children undergoing chemotherapy enjoyed a respite from medical procedures as they snuggled with Cotton the rabbit.

For Mary Beth, founding the Barn at Springbrook Farm has been “an amazing journey” filled with wonderful people. “It’s uplifting,” she said.

**Although Jay Malthaner wasn’t trained as a contractor or plumber, as part of Good Neighbors he helps about 50 families a year.**



### **Jay Malthaner: Good Neighbor**

Gail Reyes was in a jam. There had been no heat or hot water in her Kennett Square home for years, leaving her three grandchildren chilly on winter nights. The toilet repeatedly overflowed and pipes were jammed. Her income just didn’t stretch far enough to fix everything that needed repair.

Fortunately, life became brighter and warmer when John “Jay” Malthaner and Good Neighbors stepped in. The organization provided a new furnace, hot water heater, new plumbing and insulation. Volunteers, including several youth groups, shored up front and back porches, re-plastered and painted.

“I wasn’t brought up to be a contractor, engineer or plumber,” said Jay, a retired DuPont warehouse specialist and the founder of Good Neighbors. But at any given time, Jay can be found hammering nails, measuring boards or installing a sink.

“Our mission is to make homes safe, warmer and drier for people who can’t do it themselves because of physical limitations or poverty,” he said. “We help 40 or 50 families each year throughout southern Chester County.”

Jay, a chaperone on a 1992 church youth group’s mission trip to Appalachia, returned from Kentucky with the brainstorm that similar home repair efforts and fellowship could occur here in Chester County. The outcome was Good Neighbors, the small group that Jay began 17 years ago and which became a 501(c)(3) organization last year.

What keeps Jay hopeful — even when a home is so deteriorated it might be “easier to find a bulldozer” — is his deep faith and commitment to others. “When we show people love, we show them God’s love,” he said.

And that’s a good life. ♦

*Learn More at: [AfterTheBell.org](http://AfterTheBell.org); [SpringBrook-Farm.org](http://SpringBrook-Farm.org); [GoodNeighborsHomeRepair.org](http://GoodNeighborsHomeRepair.org).*