

## MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR: MAGGIE BURCH

You've probably noticed her in the halls or dining room, a rather tall woman with a warm smile and light brown hair that



may be in a bun, or a braid down her back, or a ponytail to one side. Her name is Maggie Burch,

and she has been a Treemont resident since July of 2013.

Maggie was born in Santa Fe, New Mexico, to a 19-year-old boy and his 18-year-old wife. The young couple had left their home and families in New Orleans in those latter days of the Depression just before World War II, to seek their fortune in the west. They had managed to get as far as Santa Fe when Maggie was born and the stark realities of parenthood began to press in on them: a little person who needed things like milk and round-the-clock care. When Maggie was five weeks old they very sensibly got on a bus and headed home, where they were welcomed enthusiastically by both large and loving families.

So it was that Maggie was raised in a gracious New Orleans environment surrounded by lots of aunts and uncles and cousins and grandparents. As a young girl

she saw glamorous pictures of young women then called "airline stewardesses," and fantasized about what exciting lives they must live. She finished her education at the exclusive parochial school for girls her family had chosen, then immediately after graduation applied for a job as a flight attendant with Delta Airlines. She recalls laughingly that her flight to Florida for the interview was the first time she had ever even been on an airplane. She passed Delta's rigorous requirements and was hired on the spot.

She loved her work but a young man she had met as a high schooler in New Orleans appeared on the horizon, courted her briefly and then asked her to marry him. He was well along in medical school and quite attractive, so it sounded like a good thing to do at the time, but several years and two children later some issues developed that made her realize that it was a mistake. They were divorced.

Four years later she met a dentist whose wife had passed away leaving him with three small children. He lived in Lafayette, a charming and traditional small city in south Louisiana. She accepted his proposal, married him, moved to Lafayette and went from mother of two to mother of five overnight. Their blended family of five later became his-hers-and-ours with the birth of a child to their union. She loved all the children and for years settled into the pleasant and comfortable life of being wife

and mother, with a highly respected professional for a husband and all the perks that position entailed. The children grew up and went off to college, and she could feel a great sense of accomplishment at having successfully raised six children.

With the children grown and gone, however, her life took a less idyllic turn and she found herself once again divorced and on her own, looking for a way to make both a life and a living. She had become interested in holistic health and decided to get equipped to do something with that. She enrolled in a special school in Atlanta where she became a certified massage therapist and also received training in nutrition and all phases of holistic well-being. That certification completed, she returned to Louisiana and opened the Louisiana Institute of Health and Massage to pass on what she had learned.

In time she had built a thriving business, but at age 60 she asked herself, "Is this what I want to be doing the rest of my life?" The answer, she knew, was no. In her holistic searching she had dabbled with philosophy, New Age, Eastern religions, and other ideas, but finally came back to the faith of her childhood minus some of the traditions and trappings. Her core belief settled on a personal relationship with a God who loved her unconditionally and eternally. Her life purpose became the sharing of the peace and joy that came with that conviction.

This was a moment of truth for her. It led to a visit in San Antonio with one of the children. It was to be a time of meditation and withdrawal as she sorted out what her next step should be.

Santa Rosa Hospital's chaplaincy department was looking for interns at that time, and Maggie looked into it. She applied and was accepted. After a year's training she became a full-fledged chaplain, encouraging the weary and the ill, comforting the dying, counseling the grieving and helping people all around her whether patients or visitors or even staff. She had found what she was looking for.

Ten years later she retired from work but not from life and moved to Houston. After a bad fall in her apartment she realized she needed to think about the future, and after looking around decided that Treemont was the place for her.

Maggie's life has been challenging and sometimes difficult, but she has survived with a strength and determination that come only after struggle and victory. On Monday, February 3, the Activities Department will start a pilot class in the Green Room on "Happy Hearts," with Maggie sharing some of the principles she's learned about living not "under the circumstances" but on top of them.