



# At the top:

## Four 'Best in Wellness' communities illuminate the way

**These winners of ICAA NuStep Beacon and Pinnacle Awards emanate excellence**

*by Julie King, MS*

After the restrictions, rules and isolation brought on by the pandemic, the pursuit of wellness today is stronger than ever. With greater recognition of the value of exercise to physical health, and the importance of mental health being openly addressed, wellness has become an increasingly higher priority among older adults.



*Group fitness offerings include cardio drumming at the Broadus Vitality Center on Sunnyside's Harrisonburg, Virginia, campus. Image courtesy of Sunnyside Retirement Community*

According to the International Council on Active Aging's recent "ICAA State of the Wellness Industry 2022" survey report, 81% of respondents viewed wellness as a high or essential priority for their organization.<sup>1</sup> And 53% believe their organization is based in a culture of wellness, in which all leaders, staff members and the individuals they serve collaborate to develop services and experiences that create life-affirming choices.<sup>1</sup>

The survey indicates a growing awareness of the combined power of prevention, lifestyle, care and hospitality in enhanc-

ing the lives of older adults. Wellness has shifted from a nice-to-have concept or a department, to an essential lifestyle and all-encompassing culture among senior living communities and senior care organizations.

The 2021 ICAA NuStep Beacon Award recognizes 25 senior living communities in North America as examples that embody wellness as a way of life for residents and staff. The top five communities also earn the prestigious ICAA NuStep Pinnacle Award, the joint program's award for role models of exceptional wellness cultures.

The 2021 Beacon and Pinnacle awards mark the third consecutive year that ICAA and NuStep, LLC, have spotlighted North America's "Best in Wellness" communities. "The Beacon Award continues to draw more applicants that are raising the bar when it comes to embracing wellness, so older adults can lead purpose-filled, engaged lives," says Jane Benskey, marketing communications specialist at NuStep, the Plymouth, Michigan-based manufacturer of inclusive fitness equipment. "This ulti-

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Opened in 2021, Sunnyside's 13,000-sq.-ft. Broaddus Vitality Center features an indoor walking track, swimming pool, group fitness studio, and fitness equipment for cardio, strength, flexibility and balance training. Image courtesy of Sunnyside Retirement Community

mately is a win-win for senior living organizations, their staff and residents and the industry overall.”

The last *Journal on Active Aging*® issue featured the top-ranked 2021 Pinnacle/Beacon award-winner, Tapestry at Victoria Harbour, located in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. In this article, we spotlight the other four Pinnacle/Beacon award recipients that are leading the way in fostering relevant, meaningful experiences that support residents in living better longer.

## **Sunnyside Retirement Community (Harrisonburg, Virginia)**

Now celebrating its 110-year anniversary and strengthened by a 25-year history of formal wellness programming, Sunnyside Retirement Community has won ICAA NuStep Beacon and Pinnacle Awards in the awards contest for each of its last three years.

“We constantly offer special incentives, challenges and initiatives that encourage residents to be intentional about their pursuit to nurture all seven dimensions of wellness (DOW) and to learn, grow and engage in new activities,” says Annie Schaffer, wellness director at Sunnyside. “For new residents, we measure personal DOW to establish baseline levels, which boosts individual, balanced, whole-person wellness.”

Among the wellness offerings are daily guided meditations, fitness classes, chapel services, technology fairs, workshops, outdoor activities and educational lectures from local universities, doctors and health/wellness experts. Annual special events include the “Shining Through” Holiday Tour of Lights, International Tour of Taste, Spirit Week and a specially arranged World War II aircraft flyover salute.

Residents share their expertise with the community through presentations, com-

mittees and more than 30 clubs on topics such as personality testing, DNA research, story writing, tai chi and more.

“Every Sunnyside resident is involved in participating, planning and/or implementing one or more areas of wellness programming,” Schaffer says. “Our comprehensive wellness programming permeates our entire campus.”

One invigorating campus hub is the new Broaddus Vitality Center, which counts group fitness classes, an indoor walking track, a pool, a standing stretching station, and fall reduction/cognitive training stations as favorite amenities. In fact, 76% of independent-living residents engage in Sunnyside’s fitness programming, with many coming to the Vitality Center multiple times per day and staying for hours.

Building the Vitality Center also facilitated Sunnyside’s expansion of therapy services,

which now include a gait trainer for rehabilitation and recovery and a balance system that uses virtual reality to provide feedback on mobility deficits and fall risk.

Animals provide a more subjective form of therapy on campus. Two guinea pigs, Dixon and Maze, visit residents in the assisted-living and healthcare areas and make their permanent home in the office of Executive Director Charlotte Sibold. Residents also enjoy canine companionship from Hazel, the community's Pembroke Welsh Corgi. Memory care residents and staff watched eight chicks hatch, raised them inside a brooder and eventually rehomed three roosters and moved five hens to a newly built chicken coop. They now collect eggs while feeding and caring for the chickens daily.

"Sunnyside's true wellness culture continues to empower, uplift and engage residents and staff with relevant, meaningful life-enrichment opportunities," Schaffer observes.

To encourage high employee morale and demonstrate staff appreciation, Sunnyside assembled a Shine and Support committee of mid-level managers and frontline caregivers that provide rewards—examples include an ice cream truck, mini massages and customized scratch-and-win cards.

Each year, one staff member also is presented with the "Spirit of Sunnyside." This USD\$1,000 award is based on nominations by residents for "performance, dedication, demeanor and demonstration of compassion and service that exemplify the community's life-enriching, family-like approach."

Observes Shaffer, "We are all lifelong learners striving to grow personally while helping others on their never-ending pursuit of enhanced, whole-person wellness."

### **Splendido at Rancho Vistoso (Tucson, Arizona)**

At the foundation of the wellness culture at Splendido at Rancho Vistoso are positive psychology principles in action—seeing



*Splendido at Rancho Vistoso measures resident engagement by collecting and analyzing participation data and by conducting robust engagement surveys. Image courtesy of Splendido at Rancho Vistoso*

and celebrating strengths in self and others, focusing on opportunities rather than obstacles, embracing vulnerability, encouraging creativity, and inviting residents to be equal partners in community-building, rather than solely participants of hospitality or care.

"We define wellness as the process of engaging in behaviors and decisions that enable people to experience well-being across all domains, which is most likely to occur when we can make personally meaningful choices, in pursuit of personal goals, in the context of community or relationship," says William Myers, Splendido's corporate director of wellness strategies.

The community follows the Person-Centric Wellness Model developed by Mather, a parent organization of Splendido, which also emphasizes wellness citizenship. This approach to community engagement recognizes individual responsibility to

contribute to community and societal well-being, as well as communal and societal responsibility for the wellness of citizens.

"Using the Person-Centric Wellness Model as a compass, we have recognized that a wellness culture is created by residents and employees across all areas of community life," Myers explains. "This means we are exploring how all areas of our resident life—including committees, restaurant experiences, creative expression, fitness, immersion in our natural environment and more—support wellness."

Residents meet with an in-house certified wellness coach to develop a personal wellness plan, while also participating in a nine-week group experience for peer support. Staff and residents participate in the Creating a Culture of Wellness initiative to incubate new ideas that bring to life the

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*At Splendido at Rancho Vistoso in Tucson, Arizona, intentional design elicits feelings of awe with indoor/outdoor spaces that showcase the community’s Catalina Mountains backdrop. Image courtesy of Splendido at Rancho Vistoso*

organization’s ContinuWell™ wellness philosophy. For example, Steeped in Wellness programming addressed the health benefits and ways to use more than 20 different varieties of tea and herbs, plus a former clinical psychologist and professor taught a hands-on billiards class through the resident-led Splendido Intellectual Pursuits Programs.

“Splendido empowers residents to take an active role in shaping wellness programs by sharing their diverse talents and education with the community,” Myers notes. Many of the community’s programs are possible, he says, “because residents volunteer and engage with curiosity and a collaborative spirit with speakers, workshops, events, trips and opportunities to learn from each other.”

Developed as part of a recent community expansion, the new indoor/outdoor holistic wellness studio—called Figurati (“to

imagine” in Italian)—is a popular destination. Here, residents can imagine new Ways to Age Well<sup>SM</sup> individually, participate in GetFit group fitness classes, take weekly guided meditation and visualization sessions, try vibrational sound therapy to open mind, heart and chakras, or benefit from innovative wellness technology tools.

A Week of Wellness celebrated the grand opening of Figurati. Included were classes in nature bathing, spiritual health healing, a sunset guided gratitude meditation and do-it-yourself spa at-home body scrubs and soaks.

“Wellness is not passive, but requires programming, operational support and engagement data collection and analysis,” Myers states. “The key is to adapt and continue to evolve to accelerate the well-being of Splendido’s residents. We view this as a process that’s never finished.”

## **Friendship Village of Bloomington (Bloomington, Minnesota)**

Since adopting the dimensions of wellness model in the early 1990s, Friendship Village of Bloomington has challenged ageism with evolving experiences that are engaging and evidence-based to keep people active.

“The philosophy, residents, team members, building structure, budget and leadership all support the ongoing commitment to maintain and improve lifestyle opportunities for our community,” points out Karen Lloyd, director of lifestyle at this Lifespace community. “Helping older adults see possibilities in themselves is rewarding.”

The 18,000-sq.-ft. fitness center is home to many wellness experiences, including a gym, pool, spa, golf simulator, studio, massage suite, outdoor space, café, meeting space, and “insight corner” (with articles and journals about successful aging). The

staff currently is converting to pneumatic strength-training equipment, researching the potential addition of pilates and rowing machines, and creating more personal-training spaces that will double as personal workout stations.

“This is an energizing and inviting atmosphere,” Lloyd notes. “A favorite comment we hear from many residents is, ‘I can’t believe it, but I come to the fitness center every day. Who knew?’”

A large gathering space was added to the fitness center to enable all levels of living to enjoy shared experiences. “Many long-term care, memory care and assisted-living common spaces are built for small neighborhoods, and that’s great,” Lloyd comments. “But what is often forgotten is the greater community, which is important.”

Investment in the fitness center has influenced how Friendship Village designed new areas for higher levels of care, including assisted living and skilled nursing. To encourage residents to maintain their commitment to fitness throughout the continuum of care, the community has more than quadrupled therapy space and added state-of-the-art equipment, plus created a separate fitness gym for cardio and personal training for residents requiring higher care levels.

Among the newer initiatives for the greater community are a trimester wellness theme, such as “Re-envision: Reimagine Distress,” and “Fill Your Cup: Habits for Living Long & Well.” While these originated with the fitness team, they now are campus wide. Each lifestyle director across all levels of living collaborates to offer programs to residents and share materials, articles and messages to stimulate learning and growth.

“Our community exudes a collective ‘Yes, we can...and we will for as long as we can!’ attitude about continuing to thrive through the hurdles that may come our way,” Lloyd explains. “This is a place to explore, learn, connect and bloom, with hundreds of opportunities to engage each month.”



*An attentive audience listens to a wellness lecture at Friendship Village of Bloomington, a Lifespace Community in Bloomington, Minnesota. Image courtesy of Lifespace*

This includes fitness classes and challenges, spiritual care, guest speakers, lifestyle programs, support groups and an annual Connection Fair, with more than 37 committees, interest groups and ad hoc groups on site. If residents desire an experience that isn’t offered, they can call on the Personal Services team, “BeWell,” for catered, customized assistance.

“At Friendship Village of Bloomington, we describe wellness as a process, not a destination,” Lloyd notes. “It’s about creating a thriving environment of ongoing opportunities and experiences that help a person to create a structure of personal habits that contribute to their entire being.”

### **Moorings Park (Naples, Florida)**

Wellness at Moorings Park is rooted in the organization’s mission to provide the best facilities and services for successful aging, with professional and compassionate care to each person.

“Our executive team and board of directors are dedicated to fostering a strong workplace culture that is committed to excellence in the service of others,” says Robert Sorenson, PhD, director of wellness. “They recognize and empower our wellness team to innovate beyond the traditional.” Among these innovations: the development of a new CogniFit Specialist position, a professional dedicated to creating programming for special populations; and hiring a full-time music therapist.

According to Sorenson, “We continue to push the boundaries of innovation by offering programming that ensures the well-being of each resident. We first ask, ‘Why not?’ and then, ‘How do we make it happen?’” One recent example was recruiting 10 residents to train for and participate in their first 5K road race, which resulted

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*‘Our community exudes a collective attitude’ about thriving, says Friendship Village of Bloomington’s Karen Lloyd—‘Yes, we can...and we will for as long as we can!’ Image courtesy of Lifespace*

in Moorings Park podium finishers in the 75–79, 80–84, 85–89 and 90+ age groups.

Additional wellness experiences are available through an on-site chapel, woodcrafting shop, pottery studio, full-service spa, outdoor recreation centers, beach cleanups and nature walks through the property’s botanical gardens, led by a resident master naturalist.

The “Wellness All Star” program incorporates monthly challenges built around the different dimensions of wellness and

rewards those who participate in any type of wellness program as they reach check-in milestones. Each quarter, the top male and female attendee receive wellness-themed gift baskets.

“Every day provides an opportunity for our community to expand and embrace wellness as a culture,” Sorenson comments. “The key to successful aging is doing what you love and the opportunity to discover new passions, both of which can be pursued by every resident at Moorings Park.”

## Resources

### Internet

#### ICAA NuStep “Best in Wellness” Awards

<https://beaconaward.icaa.cc>

#### International Council on Active Aging

[www.icaa.cc](http://www.icaa.cc)

#### NuStep, LLC

[www.nustep.com](http://www.nustep.com)

### Award-winners

#### Friendship Village of Bloomington

[www.friendshipvillagemn.com/](http://www.friendshipvillagemn.com/)

#### Moorings Park

[www.mooringspark.org/moorings-park](http://www.mooringspark.org/moorings-park)

#### Splendido at Rancho Vistoso

<https://splendidotucson.com/>

#### Sunnyside Retirement Community

[www.sunnyside.cc](http://www.sunnyside.cc)

#### Tapestry at Victoria Harbour

<https://tapestryvictoria.com/>

Residents enjoy doing what they love in special interest groups that they lead, such as a tennis program, cross-community bocce league and a monthly opera night hosted by a virtuoso. The Residents in Caring Committee founded the ROMEO group (retired men eating out) so widowers can socialize and participate in coordinated wellness activities. After the deaths of his wife and son within two years, resident Dean Patenaude participated in a biking trip through Spain and started a single men’s dining group, where 20 or more men regularly gather for dinner and guest speakers. “Socialization and education are as



*Nordic walkers at Moorings Park stride on rubberized walking paths. The community, located in sunny Naples, Florida, leverages its environment with year-round outdoor activities. Image courtesy of Moorings Park*

important as physical activity for our well-being,” Patenaude says.

Moorings Park also makes it a priority to scale programs both up and down so residents in any level of care can benefit. For instance, the “Best Brains” engagement program includes participants from independent living, assisted living, memory care and skilled nursing. The instructor spends the time to learn about each individual to deliver true person-centric care in a group environment.

Sorenson acknowledges that Moorings Park throws out the one-size-fits-all mentality in favor of the individual. “The roadmap to successful aging is never a defined path, but wellness is an integral part of life’s journey. We are happy to be there every step of the way.”

### Shining examples

Congratulations to all the 2021 ICAA NuStep Beacon and Pinnacle Award winners. They are examples of the virtually unlimited ways that a passionate commitment to well-

ness can enrich lives, maximize potential and extend longevity. At their core is an enthusiastic embracing of what’s possible and the perseverance to make it happen.

“All champions of active aging that cultivate thriving, evolving wellness cultures ultimately are winners,” emphasizes Colin Milner, ICAA’s founder and CEO. “Beacon Award and Pinnacle Award recipients serve as inspirational role models that are lighting the way forward.”

[Ed. For a complete list of ICAA’s 25 “Best in Wellness” communities for 2021, see the box on page 58.]

*Julie King, MS, has been a certified group exercise instructor and personal trainer for more than 25 years. She holds multiple certifications and a master’s degree in science (kinesiology). Over her career, King has led virtually every class format—including indoor cycling, mat pilates, yoga, kickboxing, boot camp and aquatics—at commercial health clubs, corporate fit-*

*ness centers, wellness centers, schools and online. She also has served as a fitness director, fitness/wellness coordinator, health club manager and a contributing editor for Club Business International magazine. King has been published in Club Industry, Club Solutions, Campus Recreation, National Fitness Trade Journal, Recreation Management and Fitness Management. She can be reached at julie.king1@comcast.net.*

### References

1. Ryan, P. (2022, June) ICAA State of the Wellness Industry 2022. Vancouver, BC: International Council on Active Aging. Available for download at [https://www.icaa.cc/listing.php?type=industry\\_research](https://www.icaa.cc/listing.php?type=industry_research).

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*The Center for Healthy Living on the Moorings Park campus promotes health and vitality with physicians services, fitness spaces and equipment, salon/spa services and a Cognitive Zone. Image courtesy of Moorings Park*

## 'Best in Wellness' communities offer inspiring examples

Congratulations to all the 2021 ICAA NuStep Beacon and Pinnacle Awards recipients that excel at embracing opportunities and enriching quality of life by fully embodying the seven dimensions of wellness: physical, social, spiritual, emotional, intellectual, vocational and environmental. These communities empower residents and staff to envision, execute and experience more in order to continually evolve their wellness culture.

### 2021 ICAA NuStep Beacon Award/ ICAA NuStep Pinnacle Award winners

1. Tapestry at Victoria Harbour (Victoria, British Columbia, Canada)
2. Sunnyside Retirement Community (Harrisonburg, Virginia)
3. Splendido at Rancho Vistoso (Tucson, Arizona)
4. Friendship Village of Bloomington (Bloomington, Minnesota)
5. Moorings Park (Naples, Florida)

### 2021 ICAA NuStep Beacon Award winners

6. Tapestry at Wesbrook Village (Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada)
7. Moorings Park Grande Lake (Naples, Florida)
8. Shell Point Retirement Community (Fort Myers, Florida)
9. The Forest at Duke (Durham, North Carolina)
10. John Knox Village of Florida (Pompano Beach, Florida)
11. Tapestry Village Gate West (Toronto, Ontario, Canada)
12. Maravilla Santa Barbara (Santa Barbara, California)
13. Maravilla Scottsdale (Scottsdale, Arizona)
14. Berwick Qualicum Beach (Qualicum Beach, British Columbia, Canada)
15. Tapestry Arbutus Walk (Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada)
16. Galloway Ridge at Farrington (Pittsboro, North Carolina)

17. Still Hopes Episcopal Retirement Community (West Columbia, South Carolina)
18. Touchmark on West Prospect (Appleton, Wisconsin)
19. Sharon Towers (Charlotte, North Carolina)
20. Meadowood Senior Living (Worcester, Pennsylvania)
21. Touchmark at Wedgewood (Edmonton, Alberta, Canada)
22. Matthews Glen (Matthew, North Carolina)
23. The Village at Northridge, a Senior Resource Group Community (Northridge, California)
24. Meadow Lakes, a Springpoint Community (East Windsor, New Jersey)
25. Heritage Community of Kalamazoo (Kalamazoo, Michigan)