

Beaming brightly:

ICAA NuStep Beacon Award winners radiate exceptional cultures of wellness



While all the 2020 award-winners are commended for ‘fostering outstanding quality of life, the top five honorees illuminate notable paths to pursue and serve as extraordinary examples to emulate’

by Julie King, MS

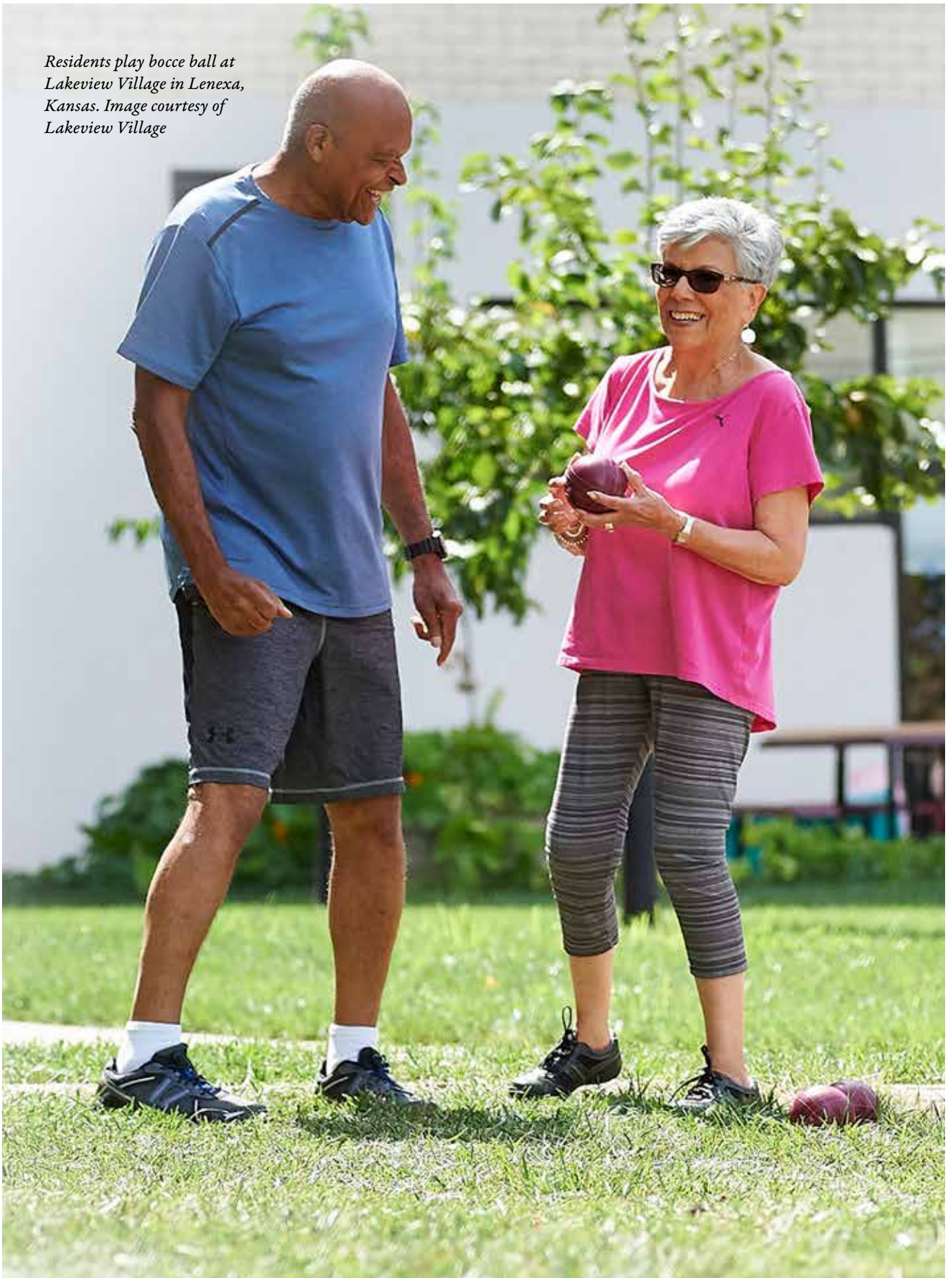
In a year like no other, 2020 presented senior living communities throughout North America with myriad challenges to deliver multidimensional wellness to residents and staff. And yet, fueled by commitment, creativity and “can-do” attitude, providers cultivated novel opportunities that empowered individuals to enhance their well-being and quality of life amid a global pandemic.

For the second consecutive year, the International Council on Active Aging® (ICAA) and NuStep, LLC, a leading manufacturer of recumbent cross-trainers, have recognized 25 communities as the “Best in Wellness” for fostering an exceptional culture and serving as examples of excellence. The 2020 ICAA NuStep Beacon Award winners deserve special credit for persevering in the face of unprecedented obstacles and ongoing changes. Adjudicated by a panel of experts, the award honors senior living communities that embody and engage ICAA’s seven dimensions of wellness: emotional, intellectual, physical, social, spiritual, vocational and environmental.

“When we launched the Beacon Award in 2019, we didn’t know what to expect,”

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Residents play bocce ball at Lakeview Village in Lenexa, Kansas. Image courtesy of Lakeview Village



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An instructor engages residents in strengthening exercises during a water fitness class at John Knox Village in Pompano Beach, Florida. Image courtesy of John Knox Village of Florida, Inc.

admits Jane Benskey, marketing communications specialist at NuStep. “The response has routinely exceeded our expectations, with many incredible organizations applying. We anticipate that momentum will continue to build for the 2021 awards.” [Ed. Interested in entering this year’s awards competition? Learn more in the “Spotlight your community” sidebar on page 36. A list naming the 2020 award-winning communities appears on page 37.]

The top five communities also earn the prestigious ICAA NuStep Pinnacle Award, which signifies exemplary wellness performance. Here we share a glimpse of what makes these role models so successful at enriching lives throughout their communities.

John Knox Village (Pompano Beach, Florida)

As the pandemic gripped the world in 2020, the marketing team at John Knox Village authored a new tagline that represented values that would support the well-being of residents and staff. “Sailing

the Seven Cs at John Knox Village” stands for care, community, connectedness, creativity, culture, credibility and confidence.

“We used the Seven Cs as inspiration for programming and wellness opportunities as we continually adapted to the challenges of COVID,” says Gerald Stryker, president and CEO of John Knox Village, a two-time winner of both the ICAA NuStep Beacon and Pinnacle Awards.

For a community that, pre-COVID, offered residents 400 programs monthly—including live musical performances, lifelong-learning lectures, art workshops, multigenerational activities, spiritual life sessions, bingo, bridge, puzzle groups and more—the team had to adapt quickly and pivot creatively to serve its population of 1,000.

Staffers developed extensive digital resources that were placed on the in-house resident portal and YouTube. These offerings included exercise videos, a cooking series, spiritual life services and lectures, technology how-to sessions and an Art Sage Gallery stroll.

Socially distanced pop-up events offered interaction via a happy hour cart, pep rallies, DJ music concerts and an ice cream cart. Additional outdoor wellness options included the 70-acre botanical garden with tropical trees, indigenous plants and flowers, a rose garden, two lakes, a wildlife habitat and a dog park.

During stay-at-home orders, the dining department shifted to preparing and delivering three freshly made meals daily to all residents. The department also introduced a popular program in which residents and staff could purchase handmade frozen meals to heat and eat at their convenience.

In a month of “Thankful Thursdays,” residents celebrated the herculean efforts of staff in every department with homemade thank-you signs, personal gifts, live music and lots of cheers.

If that wasn’t enough, John Knox Village has opened three new buildings dedicated to wellness since August 2020. The 7,200-sq.-ft. Welcome and Innovation

Center includes a demonstration kitchen and an outdoor courtyard for entertainment.

March 2021 marked the grand opening of the Aquatic Complex. This area features a resort-style pool, a lap pool, bocce ball and pickleball courts, a fire pit, a restaurant and a sports bar. Here residents can take aqua exercise classes, participate in SilverSneakers activities, enroll in scuba diving lessons and learn to kayak.

And in May 2021, the USD\$1.5-million state-of-the-art John Knox Village Center for Healthy Living, a comprehensive medical and healthcare practice, opened its doors in a strategic partnership with Everside Health, Johns Hopkins Healthcare Solutions and Holy Cross Health.

“I believe that establishing a platform for integrative complimentary wellness programming provides the overall objective to improve the lives of those inside John Knox Village, and eventually the greater community, that is paramount to long-range success,” notes Stryker.

The organization also recently announced a partnership with Florida Atlantic University’s Osher Lifelong Learning Institute to present its popular lecture and discussion programs to residents.

“There is something for everyone here,” Stryker points out. “With our integrated approach, our goal is to make wellness an integral part of the DNA of John Knox Village.”

Lakeview Village (Lenexa, Kansas)

With a 56-year history, Lakeview Village is a locally owned, nonprofit, faith-based organization that today serves more than 600 residents across all levels of care: independent living, assisted living, long-term care, home health, outpatient therapy and short stay rehabilitation. AgeStrong!, the wellness philosophy the team developed in 2008, guides its offerings.



Pickleball has become a popular sport on the 70-acre campus at John Knox Village, located in Pompano Beach, Florida. Image courtesy of John Knox Village of Florida, Inc.

Committed to “whole-person wellness” for every resident and employee plus the community as a whole, AgeStrong! integrates six of ICAA’s seven wellness dimensions: emotional, intellectual, physical, social, spiritual and vocational. The philosophy empowers residents to drive and nurture the culture for everyone in the community.

“We have intentionally woven the AgeStrong! philosophy into all levels of care, and promote it within Lakeview, as well as throughout the greater community, in outreach programs and education,” explains Jackie Halbin, Lakeview’s director of community life and wellness. “It has no boundaries.”

Reinforcing AgeStrong! is the resident-driven Community Life Committee, which plans events for residents, supports a well-rounded culture and establishes the theme of the year for Lakeview Village. Six committee sub-groups each focus on a dimension of wellness and aim to “improve the lifestyle for residents and staff every day,” Halbin notes.

Events include scheduled outings to theaters, restaurants and cultural events, along with social opportunities like tailgate parties, where attendees celebrate with food and fun before a National Football League game, and “Trunk or Treat,” which invites people at Halloween to collect treats from participating cars in a parking lot. Among the many wellness options on the 100-acre campus are: a state-of-the-art fitness center and aquatics center, bocce ball courts, a woodworking shop, Lakeview University for continuing education and personal growth, an art studio and gallery, interdenominational church services and a resident-run thrift shop that gives back to the community. The campus also features a three-acre fishing lake and three miles of walking trails.

“Our focus is on what people can do,” says Halbin, “and there are no extra charges for any programs, events or classes. We are all-

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At Lakeview Village in Lenexa, Kansas, amenities include a community garden and a greenhouse, where residents with green thumbs enjoy tending the plants. Image courtesy of Lakeview Village

inclusive and believe that wellness should not have a price tag.”

In addition to the Community Life Committee, residents shape the culture and way of life at Lakeview through the Resident Council, Dining Services, Resident Life Committee, Neighborhood News and Lakeview Foundation.

Everyone has a role to play. “Our wellness philosophy supports personal drivers such as being optimistic, always having a choice, [using] a self-directed approach, maintaining self-responsibility and promoting self-efficacy,” Halbin states.

The ongoing uncertainty of the pandemic has challenged optimism at times among both residents and staff, but optimism has

ultimately prevailed. During stay-at-home orders, the community came together (virtually) to keep each other safe and stay positive and encouraging.

“The residents were very appreciative of all our efforts, and kept telling the staff to hang in there, that this season will pass,” Halbin recalls. “Their messages and life experiences were helpful.”

The close-knit community, which endured more than a year without any events bringing them together, now more fully appreciates seeing each other and gathering like they did prior to COVID-19. In fact, the staff has recently formed a “fun” committee that is responsible for designing and holding employee events specifically for team-building and socialization.

“I’m so proud of our community,” Halbin observes. “It truly takes a village to make wellness happen, everywhere and in every way, for everyone.”

Masonic Village at Elizabethtown (Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania)

When hired 23 years’ ago at Masonic Village at Elizabethtown, Stacy Schroder was charged with developing the community’s first wellness program. Turns out, it was a more daunting undertaking than she’d anticipated.

“It took several years to help people understand that ‘wellness’ was more than just exercise and nutrition, and actually encompassed seven different dimensions,” explains Schroder, director of wellness and



Resident Alexis Henry takes part in an animal visit at Masonic Village at Elizabethtown's health care center in Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania. Image courtesy of Masonic Village at Elizabethtown

prevention. "It was a challenge to educate everyone, and culture change is slow. I wanted everything to move much faster."

Fast forward to today, and Masonic Village pledges "a focus on the wellness of body, mind and spirit" in its mission statement. Wellness is at the forefront of strategic planning and part of all campus initiatives, while the community has won multiple local and regional awards for its initiatives.

In 2000, Masonic Village formalized its commitment to wellness by earning an Eden Alternative certification. This certification recognizes the community's tireless efforts to improve well-being and foster continual growth. Among these efforts, an on-site childcare center, teen volunteer program and student workers provide frequent opportu-

nities for intergenerational interactions, and pets offer welcome contact with animals.

Plus, residents can enjoy nature among formal gardens, 12 miles of outdoor paved trails that connect 1400 acres, fishponds with fountains and a reflection pond. Outdoor pavilions are available for barbecues or picnics. And bocce courts and a putting green afford recreation.

The heart of many activities is The Baird Wellness Center, a holistic haven that houses a fitness center and nutrition, massage, chiropractic and naturopath services. In addition to traditional exercise, personal training addresses brain fitness and cognitive exercises, relaxation and centering techniques, assistance with self-efficacy and socialization in small groups.

Resident Sue Digrutto, and her husband, Terry, appreciate the variety at the Baird center. "Any type of physical or mental activity anyone could want is available here, and if not, it will be developed," Sue says. "As I age or my health changes, I can count on the wellness center to keep me as fit and healthy as possible." She personally promotes wellness by planning resident activities, including scavenger hunts, meditation, prayer groups and "healthy grilling" food demonstrations. Also available are resident clubs for golf, books, art, woodshop, writing and travel, and spiritual care sponsors widow/widower groups and nondenominational religious services.

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Resources

Internet

ICAA NuStep Beacon Awards

<https://beaconaward.icaa.cc>

International Council on Active Aging (ICAA)

www.icaa.cc

John Knox Village of Florida, Inc.

www.johnknoxvillage.com

Lakeview Village

www.lakeviewvillage.org

Masonic Village at Elizabethtown

<https://masonicvillages.org/locations/elizabethtown>

NuStep, LLC

www.nustep.com

Senior Resource Group: Maravilla Santa Barbara

www.srgseniorliving.com/communities/santa-barbara-ca-maravilla

Sunnyside Retirement Community

www.sunnyside.cc/sunnyside-harrisonburg/

Print

The editors. (2020). Beacons of excellence illuminate wellness as an essential way of life. *Journal on Active Aging*, 19(7), 32–33; November/December. Available free online to ICAA members in the “Articles” archives [search using keyword *Beacons*] at www.icaa.cc



The Baird Wellness Center offers aquatic classes in the Patton Pool at Masonic Village at Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania. Image courtesy of Masonic Village at Elizabethtown

Masonic Village’s wellness team leads sessions for one-on-one coaching, stress management, mindfulness, mental health and brain fitness. Food services supports the Eating Well/Living Well initiative across eight dining venues with healthy, farm-to-table dishes with nutrition information and specialty requests for diet restrictions.

Recreation staff coordinate social programs, trips, entertainment and lifelong learning. And a campus-wide group of employees meets quarterly to plan events for residents of all levels of care, such as a wellness fair and bonfire.

“When residents transition from retirement living to personal care or nursing care, we ensure they remain connected to their past and their passions,” Schroder points out. “Dedicated nursing, spiritual care, therapeutic recreation, social services and music therapy staff

address wellness needs. And our Integrative Therapies committee works with physicians and nurses for alternative and integrative care according to individual preferences.”

Senior Resource Group: Maravilla Santa Barbara (Santa Barbara, California)

At Maravilla Santa Barbara, wellness is much more than well-being. It encompasses “individuals who have overcome fear, old patterns and comfort zones to get more out of life, with curiosity, gratitude, optimism, love and zest,” explains Jill McRae Hyers, the community’s ZEST director. “We reach beyond the ‘ordinary’ for activities, events and ongoing connections that challenge ageism at every turn to facilitate mind, body and soul wellness.”

That’s the essence of ZEST™. Developed in 2019, this evolving program was the brain-



In a recent programming addition, the 'Strength Squad' class provides small group strength-training exercise on Senior Resource Group's Maravilla Santa Barbara campus in California. Image courtesy of SRG Maravilla Santa Barbara

child of Dr. Sarah Matyko, OTD, OTR/L, who envisioned a way for older adults to think differently about this season of their lives. It directly combats the common notion that at a certain age, people are destined to stop trying anything new.

“We overcame this by targeting specific community members, gaining their trust, finding out a secret passion that they wished they would have explored, and then designing opportunities for them to try those activities, such as art, movement, theatre and athletics,” Hyers says. “We made those residents our examples of how we never stop learning, trying, becoming and flourishing.”

Resident Halina Silverman is a perfect example. At age 97, with chronic back pain from spinal stenosis, Silverman had never exercised, but reluctantly began attending

dance and yoga classes when faced with the expectation that movement was a way of life at Maravilla Santa Barbara. Today she is pain-free, works out for 45 minutes daily, sings on weekly beach walks and shows off her biceps.

ZEST opportunities are everywhere in the community. They include laughter yoga classes, aromatherapy sessions, music therapy, lifelong-learning seminars, gardening groups, a book club, cooking demonstrations and more. Additionally, the program has offered kayaking, skydiving, boxing and hiking. A new Brain Health program targets areas to improve, such as cognition, mindfulness and sleep hygiene. Maravilla Santa Barbara also has partnered with the University of California, Santa Barbara, for intergenerational programs that bring young people to enjoy activities with residents.

“Our mindset is always focused on ‘what’s new’ and ‘what’s next,’ and we keep this at the forefront by presenting residents with different options, challenges and competitions,” Hyers says.

The pandemic has fostered new ways of embodying ZEST. Early examples included singing daily from balconies, hosting dance sessions in parking lots and staff going door-to-door each week with gifts, activities in a box and snacks. Hyers reports that the community has relied on each other more than ever, and now knows that they are willing to learn new ways of doing things.

On winning the ICAA NuStep Beacon and Pinnacle Awards for the second time, Hyers indicates, “This reinforces how we are chang-

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Spotlight your community: Call for entries for the 2021 Beacon Awards

Does your community foster a wellness culture and an environment that embraces wellness as a way of life for all who live and work there? Do you create meaningful, relevant opportunities to empower participants to improve their quality of life? Here's your chance to be recognized for your achievements. Apply for a 2021 ICAA NuStep Beacon Award, and your community may be named as a "Best in Wellness" winner. Gain a powerful tool for recruiting staff, attracting new investors or adding extra marketing prestige.

Launched in 2019 by the International Council on Active Aging® (ICAA) and NuStep, LLC, the Beacon Award recognize 25 senior living communities annually. The top five winners also receive an ICAA NuStep Pinnacle Award for exceptional contributions.

To find out more, determine if your community qualifies and apply for an ICAA NuStep Beacon Award, go to <https://beaconaward.icaa.cc>. The deadline to apply is August 26, 2021.



On the California coast, hikers from Senior Resource Group's Maravilla Santa Barbara community pause for a group photo. Image courtesy of SRG Maravilla Santa Barbara

ing lives and making older adults dream big. They now have the power to do what they didn't even know they wanted to do!"

Sunnyside Retirement Community (Harrisonburg, Virginia)

Another two-time winner of the ICAA NuStep Beacon and Pinnacle Awards, Sunnyside Retirement Community attributes its success to its dedication to continually innovate, inspire and improve.

"Too often, professionals explore the risks of different courses of action, but neglect to make a comparable assessment of the hazards of staying the course," observes Annie Shaffer, Sunnyside's wellness director. "We understand the risk of the status quo and constantly strive to build on our past proven success."

One shining example of this is the new 13,000-sq.-ft. Broaddus Vitality Center, which is the third—and largest—fitness center on the 150-acre campus. It features a pool, whirlpool, indoor track, strength and cardio area and locker rooms. The group fitness studio is home to pickleball, yoga, cardio drumming, line dancing, tai chi and more.

Sunnyside also has begun a major renovation and expansion project on its Wellness Center, which houses the therapy services/wellness area, clinic, spa and beauty salon. Plus, the organization purchased 50 adjacent underdeveloped acres in the Shenandoah Valley for walking, exercise, pet therapy, meditation and relaxation.

Services and programming revolve around ensuring that residents understand their personal dimensions of wellness in order to

develop and navigate their individualized pathways to well-being. Three Life Enrichment Coordinators (one for each level of care) collaborate to make certain that all residents have wellness opportunities that nurture all seven wellness dimensions.

“We educate and empower our participants to take an active role in improving their personal wellness by engaging in activities and experiences relevant to their values, guiding principles and interests,” Shaffer explains.

Among the many options are lunch & learn sessions, an intergenerational Festival of Trees, a Northern Lights dinner and a Moroccan Festival with henna art, fire dancers and an elaborate menu. Resident clubs include travel, belly dancing, harp playing, aviation, technology and more.



In Harrisonburg, Virginia, Sunnyside’s Broaddus Vitality Center displays ICAA and NuStep award trophies for wellness excellence. Image courtesy of Sunnyside Retirement Community

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Beacons of excellence: 25 ‘Best in Wellness’ communities for 2020

COVID-19’s emergence in 2020 upended daily life in senior living communities across North America and made it more vital than ever to nurture wellness for residents and staff. Winners of the 2020 ICAA NuStep Beacon Award—and for the top five recipients, the ICAA NuStep Pinnacle Award for exceptional wellness contributions—prioritize wellness and its pursuit as an essential way of life. These communities have worked diligently to empower and support all who live and work on their campuses to enhance their wellness.

*2020 ICAA NuStep Beacon Award/
ICAA NuStep Pinnacle Award recipients*

1. **John Knox Village of Florida (Pompano Beach, Florida)**
2. **Lakeview Village (Lenexa, Kansas)**
3. **Masonic Village at Elizabethtown (Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania)**

4. **Senior Resource Group: Maravilla Santa Barbara (Santa Barbara, California)**
5. **Sunnyside Retirement Community (Harrisonburg, Virginia)**

2020 ICAA NuStep Beacon Award recipients

6. Splendido At Rancho Vistoso (Tucson, Arizona)
7. Tapestry Arbutus Walk (Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada)
8. Tapestry Village Gate West (Toronto, Ontario, Canada)
9. The Forest at Duke (Durham, North Carolina)
10. Tapestry at Westbrook Village (Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada)
11. Westminster Palms (St. Petersburg, Florida)
12. Shenandoah Valley Westminster-Canterbury (Winchester, Virginia)
13. Carolina Meadows (Chapel Hill, North Carolina)
14. Westminster Manor (Austin, Texas)
15. Williamsburg Landing (Williamsburg, Virginia)
16. Holland Home (Grand Rapids, Michigan)
17. Fleet Landing (Atlantic Beach, Florida)
18. Matthews Glen (Matthews, North Carolina)
19. Kavod Senior Life (Denver, Colorado)
20. The Hacienda at the Canyon (Tucson, Arizona)
21. Galloway Ridge at Fearington (Pittsboro, North Carolina)
22. Paradise Valley Estates (Fairfield, California)
23. Mather Place Wilmette (Wilmette, Illinois)
24. Maravilla Scottsdale (Scottsdale, Arizona)
25. The Fountains at Boca Ciega Bay (St. Petersburg, Florida)

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In 2020, Sunnyside Retirement Community delivered outdoor activities—including carriage rides—as part of the festivities for its annual Holiday Gala on the 100+ acre campus in Harrisonburg, Virginia. Image courtesy of Sunnyside Retirement Community

The annual Wellness Day has featured cardio drumming, spa experiences and a trail mix bar, while Spirit Week—which embodies the “Spirit of Sunnyside”—includes a staff and resident talent show, social events, costume contest and games.

“Our responsibility to residents is not to merely entertain,” stresses Shaffer. “Instead, we motivate and inspire through collaboration with all Sunnyside departments, our residents, and the community.”

One example: The Wellness team and resident Green Committee worked together to develop maps of the campus trails, then established an area in the Vitality Center to borrow walking poles and weighted vests plus access maps and brochures about wildflowers and trees on site.

During the pandemic, Sunnyside hasn’t missed a beat. The community instituted online “Action for Happiness” challenges, daily guided meditation, scavenger hunts and carnation deliveries. In March 2020, staff distributed resistance bands to residents to use for televised exercise classes, while temporary satellite wellness centers sprang up in common areas and


featured socially distanced exercise equipment for residents to use.

Staff also reimagined the annual Holiday Gala, making it an outdoor event, complete with a gingerbread house decorating contest, carriage rides, live music and decorated trees, and a hand-delivered assortment of special hors d’oeuvres and champagne or sparkling water.

“Our family-like atmosphere fosters a genuine interest in improving others’ well-being, sense of purpose and happiness,” Shaffer concludes.

Lighting the way

The common denominator among the five winners of the ICAA NuStep Beacon and Pinnacle Awards is a steadfast determination to celebrate life by maximizing wellness opportunities in all seven dimensions of wellness. This optimism and expectation manifest themselves in a deliberate *carpe diem* mindset, in which community members are encouraged to intentionally and regularly nurture their bodies, minds and spirits. Staff set the bar high, routinely expect more and go the extra mile. They epitomize the well-known saying: “Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.”

While every ICAA NuStep Beacon Award winner is commended for dedication to fostering outstanding quality of life, the top five honorees illuminate notable paths to pursue and serve as extraordinary examples to emulate. 

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 fitness 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.