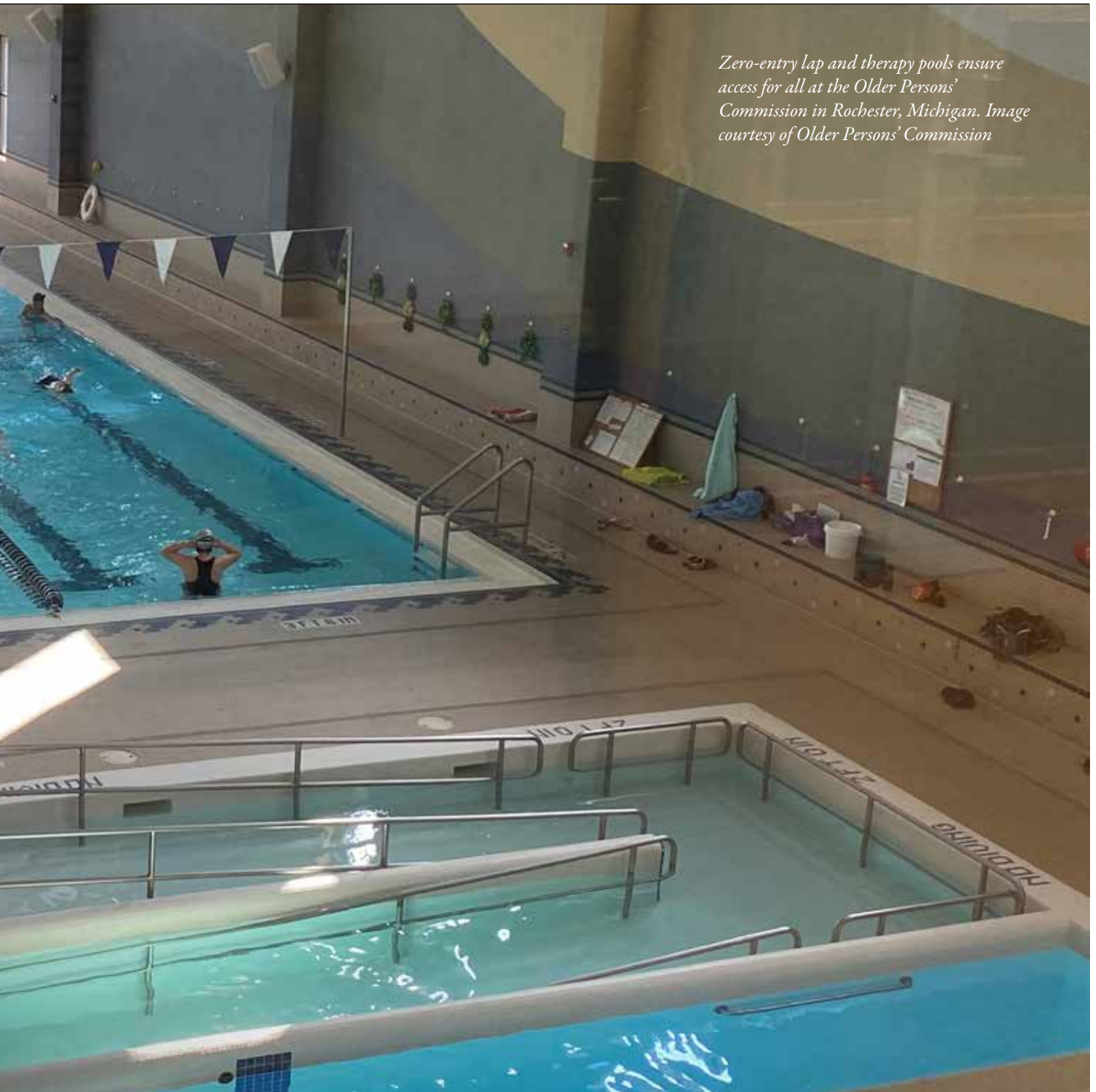


‘Best in Wellness’ centers

foster environments for
living better longer

The 2022 ICAA NuStep Pinnacle Award expanded to include community centers. Learn about four centers committed to embracing wellness as a way of life—and bringing people together

by Julie King, MS



Zero-entry lap and therapy pools ensure access for all at the Older Persons' Commission in Rochester, Michigan. Image courtesy of Older Persons' Commission

As wellness becomes a principal focus of the people and organizations that serve older adults, the International Council on Active Aging® (ICAA) and NuStep, LLC, have expanded their popular annual awards program. Since 2019, the ICAA NuStep Beacon Award has named 25 senior living communities in North America as the “Best in Wellness” yearly. Of these recipients, the top five also have received the ICAA NuStep Pinnacle Award for extraordinary performance.

In 2022, ICAA and NuStep added two categories to the Pinnacle Award: community centers (senior centers, parks and recreation facilities, adult day services), and wellness CEOs that demonstrate outstanding commitment to fostering a wellness culture.

“We are thrilled to recognize the top five community centers and wellness CEOs now as part of the prestigious Pinnacle

Awards,” says Colin Milner, founder and CEO of ICAA. “Among a competitive field of entrants, our first-time recipients should be proud of their achievements and dedication to enhancing the lives of active older adults through wellness.”

The top winner in the community centers category for 2022, The Center at Belvedere

Continued on page 62

'Best in Wellness' centers foster environments for living better longer

Continued from page 61



In St. Joseph, Missouri, the Joyce Raye Patterson 50+ Activity Center offers a fully equipped fitness center as well as a circuit training room and a variety of fitness classes to meet different fitness levels. Image courtesy of City of St. Joseph

in Charlottesville, Virginia, will be featured in an upcoming issue of the *Journal on Active Aging*®. In this article, we highlight the other four Pinnacle Award recipients as shining examples among community centers.

Older Persons' Commission (Rochester, Michigan)

Designed exclusively for the 50+ population in Greater Rochester, Michigan, the Older Persons' Commission (OPC) is engaged in helping its 12,000 members age well through extensive wellness programming, services and support at the 90,000-sq.-ft. facility.

"The OPC's wide spectrum of support, health, wellness, social, enrichment and fitness programming provides a safety net and safe place [for individuals] to explore new experiences and learn to live in as fulfilling a manner as possible in their 50s and beyond," states Renee Cortright, OPC executive director. "We provide a multifaceted

approach to physical, social, intellectual and emotional health."

OPC members can enjoy programs such as boxfit, pickleball, pottery, lapidary, performing arts, language classes, games, leisure travel, aquatic yoga, and wine and food pairing events. Participants share their expertise and take leadership roles within the community. Some have led kayaking and biking groups, writing and photography workshops, boxing and tang soo do instruction, and caregiving and dementia presentations.

"The variety of our programming speaks to the younger mindset of older adults," Cortright explains. "The seniors of today are more sophisticated and generally look forward to being more active, mobile and productive as they 'rewire,' not retire!"

Monthly wellness education includes Savvy Seniors, Ask-the-Doctor, Life-Long Learning and Evidenced-Based Program-

ming, with topics covering brain health, ergonomics, cooking for one or two, elder law, estate planning, meditation, and more. To support aging in place, OPC also offers Meals on Wheels, Adult Day Services for those with dementia or disabilities, transportation and senior resources.

"Wellness is a personal journey, and each individual has specific and diverse needs," Cortright says. "The OPC makes every attempt to meet and support each person where they are and provide everything necessary for success. Individual accomplishment, whether minuscule or remarkable, is a victory."

The sense of family and community at OPC, along with high participation levels, are among the organization's greatest strengths. "We recently celebrated 135 of our active nonagenarian members that participate in a myriad of activities at the center," mentions Cortright. "When asked the secret to their longevity, many of them

attributed it to the multitude of activities at OPC that have provided them with social connections.”

Fostering that supportive environment are the dedicated staff and volunteers at OPC, who Cortright describes as “mission-driven, with the professional purpose of creating and providing daily experiences to better the lives of seniors.” She adds, “OPC is changing the outdated mindset in the community that we are a ‘senior center of yesteryear,’ as we provide a variety of dynamic and cutting-edge programming for a sophisticated and energetic demographic.”

Wylie Senior Recreation Center (Wylie, Texas)

The mission of Wylie Senior Recreation Center, part of the Parks and Recreation Department in Wylie, Texas, is to “spark connection with self, family and community through active and engaging activities, meaningful experiences and social networking.”

According to Recreation Supervisor Katy Burton, “Improving the physical and mental well-being of the active-adult community is the heart and soul of [the center]. Our staff genuinely cares for our participants,” she says, “and is dedicated to providing them with programs, people and resources that help them navigate these years.”

Among those activities and programs are: a fitness center, group exercise classes, line dancing, trips to the farmers market and local restaurants, wellness 101 lectures, arts and crafts, games, gardening and more. Wylie also offers access to services such as Meals on Wheels, the Collin County Rides Program and the North Central Texas Area Agency on Aging.

The family atmosphere fostered by employees is the greatest strength of Wylie Senior Recreation Center. “Our staff is the lynch-

“The [Center] provides a safe and welcoming place for adults 55 years of age and older to gather for fun, learning, and [to] improve wellness through human connection.”

– Jeni Lambert, Wylie Senior Recreation Center



A November 2022 hike created high spirits among adventurers in O.A.T.S. (Outdoor Active Traveling Seniors), a group from Thrive55+ in Groton, Connecticut. Image courtesy of Thrive55+ Active Living Center

pin of the center and go above and beyond every day—calling participants we haven’t seen in a while, sending cards to those going through a tough time or reaching out to city departments and organizations,” Burton adds.

In fact, when the facility was closed for six months due to the pandemic, staff made wellness calls to more than 200 participants every week to gauge mental wellness, assist with grocery delivery scheduling and let them know that they weren’t alone. Since the center reopened in August 2020, membership has continued to grow, as has programming.

To accommodate demand, an upcoming renovation includes the building’s exterior, an expansion of the fitness center and restrooms, and the addition of a consultation office for staff or nurses to meet with guests. A 5,000-sq.-ft. addition with special event space is planned in the future for large group activities.

“Every building improvement, activity programmed and staff member hired is done with the well-being of our participants in mind,” Burton observes. “To keep our offerings fresh, staff continually request feedback, pursue continuing education, conduct surveys of neighboring facilities and research new trends.”

Embracing the center’s mission, members began adopting a local family in need at Christmastime in 2013, collecting and selling recyclable items year-round to raise money for the family. This participant-run program has grown to include multiple families each holiday season.

“We have built an environment that allows participants to gain social, mental and physical connections that they don’t get elsewhere,” Burton says, “and it shows the moment they walk through the door.”

Continued on page 64

'Best in Wellness' centers foster environments for living better longer

Continued from page 63



The Older Persons' Commission recognizes the importance of high-quality photos to market its 90,000-sq-ft. center in Rochester, Michigan. Image courtesy of Older Persons' Commission

Thrive55+ Active Living Center (Groton, Connecticut)

Formerly the Groton Senior Center, Thrive55+ aims to keep older adults an active part of the community and aging in place by addressing the seven dimensions of wellness.

“Our focus is on providing opportunities for older adults to stay active, learn about their health and nutrition, recreate, social-

“We have 12,000 registered members ranging in age from 50 to 100+, some more active than others. This mix of ages and abilities has created lasting friendships, which emphasizes the importance of socialization at any age.”

— Renee Cortright, Older Persons' Commission

ize, and be part of the community,” says Mary Jo Riley, Thrive55+ supervisor. “We define wellness as any activity that leads to better health, better fitness, and better spirit—from learning something new, taking a walk or meditating.”

The fitness center and exercise classes are among the most popular options, with almost 500 participants. Pickleball was added a few years ago when a participant returned from winter in Florida and wanted to start this program at Thrive55+.

Also well-attended are the organization's day trips and travel throughout the United States and internationally. “One woman who participated in our walking program wrote us a letter of thanks after she went on our trip to New York and was able to walk to the top of the Statue of Liberty,” Riley recalls.

The cooking and gardening programs led to the “Just Picked” free weekly workshops where local chefs address culinary techniques to take advantage of fresh, locally grown produce. Cooking with Diabetes is a grant program offered with the local health district, and an on-staff dietitian provides nutrition counseling. The center also provides healthy, low-cost meals.

Other programming includes music, arts and enrichment; games; and social events like afternoon teas, birthday celebrations and movie nights. Participants are encouraged to implement and lead programs, in part through self-directed groups in the organization's volunteer program, such as the gardening group, entertainment group, coffee shop group, Club 55 and Thrive Ambassadors.

Continued on page 66

Honoring North America's best and brightest in older-adult wellness

Does your community cultivate a true wellness culture for all who live and work there? Do you believe your center is the best choice for older adults who want to engage in wellness? Does the organization you lead prioritize wellness, integrating it into your strategic planning, vision and budgeting to promote a culture of growth?

You're invited to apply for an ICAA NuStep Beacon or Pinnacle Award. Tell us about your organization's achievements, contributions and commitment to wellness. You may be recognized as a “Best in Wellness” senior living community, community center or wellness CEO.

The 2023 awards competition opens March 15 and closes June 2. For information, or to determine eligibility and apply for an award, visit <https://beaconaward.icaa.cc>.

'Best in Wellness' centers foster environments for living better longer

Continued from page 64



As a city-run facility in Wylie, Texas, the Wylie Senior Recreation Center offers 'something for everyone,' with the goal to bring people in and strengthen connections. Image courtesy of City of Wylie Parks and Recreation/Wylie Senior Recreation Center

"I'm most proud of the ownership that our older adults take in Thrive55+, and how they give of themselves," Riley says. "They feel a part of Thrive55+ because they have a say in what goes on, their feedback is encouraged and their ideas are heard."

Thrive55+ has earned six National Institute of Senior Centers Programs of Excellence Awards through the National Council on Aging. The first Connecticut senior center to have a computer learning center, Thrive 55+ also houses a fitness center, music room, wet and dry crafts rooms, full commercial kitchen, five classrooms, a health room and a salon.

In addition, the organization runs Discover Connections for persons with mild to moderate dementia to learn, exercise and have fun. The staff also supports individu-

als by providing information on senior housing and by working with other service providers, including the Visiting Nurses Association, the local health district, and the Area Agency on Aging.

Joyce Raye Patterson 50+ Activity Center (St. Joseph, Missouri)

Owned and operated by the Parks, Recreation & Civic Facilities Department of the city of St. Joseph, Missouri, the Joyce Raye Patterson 50+ Activity Center (JRP) is a 22,000-sq.-ft. community hub that serves to strengthen physical, social and emotional well-being.

"Wellness is woven into the fabric of our inviting culture," points out Julie Noel, senior center manager. "Due to our partner-

ships with local health and wellness community organizations, we offer programs that are nationally recognized, which provide a wide variety of opportunities."

Examples include: Stay Strong, Stay Healthy fitness classes provided by the University of Missouri Extension of Andrew and Buchanan Counties; health classes such as Walk with Ease, delivered by Arthritis Community Services; and free blood pressure screenings from area hospice partners. The JRP also hosts events like an Active Adult Symposium that offers health screenings and addresses topics such as aging in place, medication management, elder law and more.

The fitness center houses a variety of equipment, multiple classes for all fitness levels



A weekly Basic Yoga class includes no floor work, making it a more accessible option for some at the Joyce Raye Patterson 50+ Activity Center in St. Joseph, Missouri. Image courtesy of City of St. Joseph

and a circuit training room—all overseen by a Fitness Coordinator that orients participants to the machines, offers modifications and coaches them on goals. Line dancing lessons and weekend line dances are popular as well.

Games are a big draw at JRP, including billiards, bridge, mahjong, snooker, table tennis, dominos, cornhole, board games and a Nintendo® Wii gaming system. The center also features a computer lab, library and lunchtime cafeteria.

“We’ve developed a family atmosphere here and have regular customers that participate in one or more of these activities daily and weekly,” Noel says. “One of our biggest strengths is community-building.” Local groups—The Pool Players Associa-

tion, the Master Gardeners and the St. Joseph Stamp Club, among others—use space at the JRP to meet and recruit new members.

Integral to community-building is the open communication fostered by JRP staff, who seek continual feedback and conduct monthly polls to solicit input on programming and operations.

“We make it a practice to get to know everyone that uses our facility,” Noel explains. “Regular one-on-one interaction with our customers helps us know their needs, learn what we are doing well and understand where we need to improve.”

Continued on page 68

Resources

Internet

ICAA NuStep “Best in Wellness” Awards (Beacon and Pinnacle Awards)

<https://beaconaward.icaa.cc>

International Council on Active Aging (ICAA)

www.icaa.cc

NuStep, LLC

www.nustep.com

Award-winners

The Center at Belvedere

<https://thecenterctville.org/>

Older Persons’ Commission

www.opcseniorcenter.org

Joyce Raye Patterson 50+ Activity Center

www.stjosephmo.gov/251/Joyce-Raye-Patterson-50-Activity-Center

Thrive55+ Active Living Center

<https://seniorcenterct.org/groton/>

Wylie Senior Recreation Center

www.wylietexas.gov/facilities/senior_rec_center/index.php

Print

The editors. (2022). ICAA NuStep “Best in Wellness” award-winners revealed for 2022. *Journal on Active Aging*, 21(6), 22–25. Available free online to ICAA members [“Management articles”, “Industry development” category] at <https://www.icaa.cc>

'Best in Wellness' centers foster environments for living better longer

Continued from page 67



At Wylie Senior Recreation Center in Wylie, Texas, group exercise classes focus on improving member mobility, balance and strength. Image courtesy of City of Wylie Parks and Recreation/Wylie Senior Recreation Center

What's important is acting on this feedback. "Staff are willing to bring back old programming, explore new trends, and research the wants and needs of individuals 50 and older," Noel adds. "We also continue to build relationships with regional organizations to evolve our wellness culture and provide new, interesting and fun opportunities for our customers. It's truly a team effort."

Peak performance

ICAA and NuStep commend every winner of the 2022 Beacon and Pinnacle Awards for their vision, dedication and execution—all of which support older adults in their efforts to live better longer. The awards program recognizes that community centers that embrace wellness as a way of life provide a valuable resource for those aging in place in the greater community. These centers also support individuals in feeling connected to their communities and each other.

As wellness continues to transform the active-aging industry, we can look forward to celebrating even more organizations that are illuminating the way forward. 🌀

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.

Winning the Pinnacle: top-ranked community centers

The ICAA NuStep Pinnacle Award named five winners in its new community centers category in 2022. Judges evaluated the centers based on how they answered questions about wellness culture, marketing strategies, measuring engagement or participation, use of participant feedback to guide future directions, the built environment, and more.

Here's how the winners ranked:

1.

The Center at Belvedere

(Charlottesville, Virginia)

2.

Older Persons' Commission

(Rochester, Michigan)

3.

Wylie Senior Recreation Center

(Wylie, Texas)

4.

Thrive55+

(Groton, Connecticut)

5.

Joyce Raye Patterson 50+ Activity Center

(St. Joseph, Missouri)