

Meet Mooring's Park:

The #1 wellness-based
community in North
America



A new ICAA/NuStep joint award recognized this Florida community for its 'Best in Wellness' achievements

by Sally Abrahms

Creating an outstanding wellness culture in senior living takes a lot of heavy lifting, vision and commitment. And, as industry experts see it, it is something critical to cultivate.

The International Council on Active Aging's 2019 ICAA State of Wellness Survey¹ queried 305 senior living communities about the value of having services, programs and environments that support a wellness culture. They say it improves the well-being of residents, keeps their community relevant in a changing industry, differentiates them from competitors, attracts younger

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Moorings Park residents lead active lives on the community's 83-acre Naples, Florida, campus. Among the many amenities are walking paths and tennis courts

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Built in 2013, the 37,000-sq.-ft. Center for Healthy Living features physicians services, fitness spaces and equipment, plus a Cognitive Zone, wellness shop and Internet café

adults and garners extra income through wellness programs.

Another ICAA survey,² conducted in 2018, reveals that 59% of senior living communities plan to have a wellness lifestyle-with-options-for-care model (versus a healthcare-first-with-wellness-features) within the next five years. Currently, 64% of industry leaders believe wellness is a “must have.”

In its first year, ICAA and NuStep, LLC, a leading manufacturer of recumbent cross-trainers, have given the ICAA NuStep Beacon Award to those that best foster, and imbue, wellness into their senior communities.³

Most recently, five industry judges considered nearly 100 contenders for

the annual award. And the number one wellness-based community in North America went to Moorings Park, a life-plan community in Naples, Florida. (By placing in the top five communities, Moorings Park also received the ICAA NuStep Pinnacle Award, a new joint program that carries on the trailblazing vision of the original NuStep honor.³)

Why Moorings Park?

“We have more of a holistic approach than, ‘What are we doing for exercise today?’” says Robert Sorenson, director of wellness on the original Moorings Park campus that won the award. (There are two other campuses nearby, one known as Moorings Park at Grey Oaks and the other, Moorings Park Grande Lake, which opens in early 2020.)

“We treat wellness as a culture and not as a program,” comments Sorenson. “In every area and department, there is an element of wellness present,” he says, referring to “every touchpoint with a resident, whether it be level of care or service.” This focus throughout the community integrates the industry’s commonly accepted seven dimensions of wellness that foster successful aging: physical; social; spiritual; vocational; emotional; environmental; and intellectual.

Moorings Park constantly focuses “on ways to improve offerings to enhance those dimensions,” adds CEO and President Dan Lavender.

That goes for employees, too. “Partners,” as they are called, earn wellness points for participating in programs and events.

As an incentive, the organization contributes to their health insurance.

“We have committed the resources which demonstrate not only to residents, but also to people who work here, that taking care of yourself leads to a higher quality of life,” says Lavender. Residents and partners often participate in events together such as The Walk to End Alzheimer’s, the American Cancer Society’s Relay for Life and a yearly putting competition.

Today, the annual wellness budget at Moorings Park is USD\$1 million and it has grown to eight employees in that department. “You have to put as much into wellness as you would any facility,” comments Lavender.

A culture of wellness begins in Moorings Park’s mission statement. “At Moorings Park, we consider what is necessary to achieve ‘successful aging’ and offer that to our residents,” says Sorenson. “This philosophy loops back in with our mission, vision and values. Having meaningful relationships and a sense of wholeness is what directs all of our programs.”

There is also an emphasis on spirituality, another of the dimensions. “We talk about being part of something greater than ourselves,” states Lavender. Residents are encouraged “to embrace nature,” he says, adding that even the beach can be a spiritual activity.

It can be a challenge to keep wellness front and center in any senior living community. At Moorings Park, the message comes from the top, from the board of directors to the executive team.

Sorenson notes that several members of the Board of Directors reside at Moorings Park. “If they feel wellness programs need to be available and they need great wellness facilities, it is not just guidance from the top,” he says, “but also people living here.”

“It is constant reinforcement,” according to Lavender. “We talk about wellness in all our partner meetings—and not just in relation to residents but how partners can take care of themselves,” he explains.

“We say from orientation on that everything we do needs to enhance residents’ mind, body and spirit,” Lavender reveals. He believes the 24/7 wellness mindset gives the employees “a sense of purpose greater than just punching a clock at work. It has also created a shared community focusing on wellness.”

That sense of purpose, and living the best later life possible, makes everyone feel invested in an overarching goal—in other words, united. Residents, should they

want to, learn what they need to do to stay healthy and happy.

Wellness from the start

At Moorings Park, the concept of wellness can begin even before a resident moves in. Those who don’t feel ready for campus living can take part in wellness offerings as a “member” so when they eventually do move in, they already will be enmeshed in the culture and community.

All new residents meet one-on-one with staff to learn about the community’s wellness programs and services. They receive a free fitness assessment, helping

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Resources

Internet

Delos

<https://delos.com>

FallProof Balance and Mobility Program

<http://hhd.fullerton.edu/csa/WholePerson/55WellnessProg.htm>

ICAA NuStep Beacon Awards

<https://beaconaward.icaa.cc>

International Council on Active Aging (ICAA)

www.icaa.cc

Johns Hopkins University Division of Geriatric Medicine and Gerontology

www.hopkinsmedicine.org/geriatric_medicine_gerontology/

LIVunLtd

<https://livunltd.com>

Mather Institute on Aging and Northwestern University: Age Well Study

www.matherlifewaysinstituteonaging.com/agewellstudy/

Moorings Park

www.mooringspark.org

NuStep, LLC

www.nustep.com

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Residents attended the 2019 kickoff for a weekly wellness lecture series at the Center for Healthy Living's 78-seat Sheffield Theatre. Series speakers came from within Moorings Park and the community at large, while attendance counted towards the UPLIFT program

employees to identify their fitness needs and craft an individual plan. There is also a yearly follow-up assessment.

Weekly Tuesday lecture series (that's 52 speakers!) are delivered in a TED Talk format. Over the course of the year, it covers all seven dimensions of wellness. Up at bat recently was the strength and conditioning coach from the Boston Red Sox to explain his program. Another time, it was a local physician who talked about volunteering his medical services in Haiti. Other speakers come from different departments at Moorings Park and professionals from the surrounding Naples community.

As an incentive for residents to stay engaged and have fun, last year [2019] the wellness department launched its

UPLIFT (as in Unlimited Potential, Lives Inspired, Futures Transformed) Program. Residents receive a small passport-sized booklet with wellness activities for the whole year. All programs and events are broken down by the seven areas of wellness so individuals can understand the benefits.

When residents participate in a new class, lecture or program, a staff member initials their "passport." If they wear their UPLIFT badge to a wellness event, they are entered into a quarterly raffle drawing for, naturally, wellness-related gifts.

An eight-week walking program has residents keep track of their daily steps. Based on the participants' counts, the wellness department sends them a "postcard" from a unique location. Let's say

they walked 8,000 steps. The postcard might be from "Tokyo," 8,000 miles from Naples—a liberal interpretation of distance, indeed!

Departments communicate with one another if they have a concern about a resident. For instance, if the dining staff notices an older adult is having a hard time getting from their table to the buffet, they will let the wellness team know. The national FallProof™ Balance and Mobility program offered at Moorings Park might be the antidote. Or, if a regular movie buff has stopped attending weekly films, an employee will get in touch with the wellness department.

A robust transformation

Moorings Park's focus on wellness goes back to 2007. "We wanted to make a

difference in the quality of life of our residents in addition to having excellent healthcare,” explains Lavender. At the time, they had just one half-time fitness employee and a “physical workout space of 1,000 sq. ft.,” he says.

First thing they did was to quadruple the size of the community’s original Petti Center and, in addition, in 2013, build the USD\$23-million Center for Healthy Living, a 37,000 sq.-ft. building that has won several architecture awards.

The Center has offices for physicians and others in the medical field (i.e., on-site nurses and physicians, neuropsychiatrists, cardiologists, ophthalmologists and specialists in osteoporosis and cancer). And, in collaboration with Johns Hopkins University Division of Geriatric Medicine and Gerontology, the community recently began a novel fellowship for geriatric experts who want a career in leadership. After training in geriatric medicine for one year at Johns Hopkins, the physician spends the next six months at Moorings Park in skilled nursing and interacting with physicians at the Center’s clinic, learning about leadership, clinical care and senior practice management. The second fellow will go through the program in July 2020.

Besides outpatient rehabilitation and a program that integrates healthcare with other Moorings Park services, the Center has cutting-edge exercise equipment, group fitness and personal trainers, memory classes and virtual technology to stimulate the brain. It also features an Internet café, a wellness retail shop that sells athletic gear and goods, a salon and spa (i.e., massage, aromatherapy) and a 78-person theater/multifunctional space with surround sound.

Activities and amenities abound

Whether residents live in one of the more than 400 independent-living residences, assisted living, skilled nursing

or memory care, Moorings Park has 83 acres of lakes, gardens and preserves. Among the community’s offerings are miles of wheelchair-accessible walking paths (made with ground tire for extra joint support), a dog park, multiple butterfly gardens, a “contemplation plaza,” recreational and competitive tennis, an 18-hole putting green, a chipping green, a bocce pavilion, garden plots, a wood-crafting shop and pottery studio.

But it isn’t those facilities that make Moorings Park Beacon Award-worthy, say this year’s judges.

One judge, Regina Vaicekonyte, was swayed, in part, by the community’s holistic approach to wellness. “Fostering a wellness-focused culture among residents and staff is key to ensuring that you will have a thriving community. It should be prioritized over anything else,” believes Vaicekonyte, vice president of Delos Labs at Delos, a wellness real estate and technology company. “Having physical wellness amenities is essential, but it’s just one piece of the puzzle.”

Judge Kate Mearns found Moorings Park’s participation in a national study significant. In its second year, the Mathers LifeWays Institute on Aging/Northwestern University study is comparing the self-reported health and wellness of residents in a life-plan community to those who don’t live in one.⁴ The goal is to understand the long-term impact of such communities on health and wellness.

“I respect organizations that work for the betterment of the whole industry,” says Mearns, director of spa and wellness at LIVunLtd, which oversees services at resorts, spas, residential and commercial buildings and country clubs.

Mearns also thinks the menu of services at Moorings Park’s spa and salon are

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Light your light shine

Does your community foster a wellness culture and an environment that embraces wellness as a way of life for everyone who lives and works there? Do you create meaningful, relevant opportunities that empower participants to improve their quality of life? If you believe your community puts the “well” in wellness, here’s your chance to be recognized. Apply for a 2020 ICAA NuStep Beacon Award, and you may be honored as a “Best in Wellness” community for your achievements. It offers you a powerful tool for recruiting staff, attracting new investors or adding extra prestige to marketing materials.

Launched last year by the International Council on Active Aging® (ICAA) and NuStep, LLC, the Beacon Award will recognize 25 senior living communities this year, with recipients’ best practices to be catalogued and publicized on the award website. In addition, the top five Beacon Award winners will receive an ICAA NuStep Pinnacle Award for their exceptional contributions.

To learn more, determine if your community qualifies and apply for an ICAA NuStep Beacon Award, go to <http://beaconaward.icaa.cc>. The deadline to apply is April 20, 2020.

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At the Center for Healthy Living, workouts target residents' balance, flexibility, cardio and bone mass in the Cardio/Strength Area, which features cutting-edge exercise equipment

“thorough and diverse, and consistent with what we see in the resort industry. It is a well thought out amenity.”

Boomers on their mind

In 2020, the oldest Boomers turn 74⁵; that fact is not lost on senior living leadership. The average age of adults who live in independent- or assisted-living communities is 84,⁵ according to ProMatura Group's Margaret Wylde. Among those living in communities with lifecare and many amenities, that age is almost 81⁶—which is why providers and developers want to know what Boomers want.

Moorings Park does its due diligence. Before they built the Center for Healthy Living, they decided to take the pulse of

industry experts and learn about the most innovative places in the wellness world. From 2008 through 2010, they visited facilities in Arizona, Illinois and North Carolina.

More locally, a single-family home neighborhood nearby in Naples—a neighborhood that is a big feeder into Moorings Park—was building a wellness center for area residents, many of whom are in their 50s and 60s. “We knew they would be our potential customers, so we wanted to make sure we were building for them,” says Lavender.

When it came time to build the Center, they incorporated the best elements from their “road show” into their facility, equipment, programming and services.

Always learning

The staff at Moorings Park is hardly sitting on its laurels. “We are always growing and tweaking what we do and looking to improve,” Lavender comments. If they hear about a place doing something new or inventive, they visit.

In the next few years, Lavender predicts there will be more technology tools and health and wellness data readily available. Sorenson, the community's wellness director, knows that tomorrow's residents are likely to be more tech savvy.

Sorenson sees delivering video programs to residents' smartphones. And then there is brain health. “We are beginning to see younger residents are more mind-

ful of cognitive health and they know that first signs and symptoms can start 20 years after initial onset of disease,” Sorenson observes. Moorings Park is anticipating this awareness by developing better cognition programming to support more residents whose goal is to delay the decline. “We don’t want it to be 10 sessions and you’re done,” he says.

“The customer is changing,” emphasizes Lavender. “People used to choose a life-plan community as a safety net, but today people are just as interested, if not more, in how will you make sure the quality of my life will be better for having made that move?” Moorings Park is clearly on the right track. 🎵

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Street Journal, TIME, Newsweek, the New York Times, AARP, PBS’s Next Avenue, the Boston Globe, Forbes and the Washington Post. *Abrahms also writes for, and consults to, companies focusing on the 50+ demographic. For more information, visit www.sallyabrahms.com.*

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