

# Beacons of excellence:

Profiling winners in the wellness culture space



**A new ICAA NuStep awards program recognizes exceptional contributions to wellness as a way of life in senior living communities—for residents and staff alike. Read on to learn about four award-winners**

*by Julie Halpert*

After 15 years living in a rural community on the Chesapeake Bay, Joel Grow, 69, and his wife, Rebecca, 73, decided to move to a senior living community. The Grow's don't

have children. They feared that getting care as they aged would be challenging in their remote setting on America's Mid-Atlantic coast. An acquaintance suggested they visit Sunnyside Retirement Community, a life-plan community located in Harrisonburg, Virginia.

Looking to maintain their active lifestyle, the Grow's were attracted to Sunnyside's numerous fitness classes. "The instructors were capable and well trained and just nice, caring people who knew how to be helpful

*Continued on page 48*

*Presbyterian Village North in Dallas, Texas, promotes 'a lifestyle filled with activity and fitness.' Image courtesy of Presbyterian Village North*





# Beacons of excellence: Profiling winners in the wellness culture space

*Continued from page 46*



*Maravilla Santa Barbara adventurers enjoy an active day out from the Senior Resource Group community in California. Image courtesy of SRG Maravilla Santa Barbara*

to those who aren't 25 anymore," Joel says. The couple moved to Sunnyside in March 2018. Since then, they have discovered a rich lifestyle, participating in movie and travel clubs, playing pool regularly and attending numerous local concerts. "I haven't lived in any other retirement community, but I know this is a wonderful place," Joel states.

In fact, Sunnyside is more than a nice place to live. Along with state and international awards (including four ICAA Innovators Awards for excellence in wellness programming), the Virginia community is one of the top five winners of the inaugural ICAA NuStep Beacon Award, announced October 2019. The other top winners are:

- Moorings Park in Naples, Florida,<sup>1</sup>
- Senior Resource Group: Maravilla in Santa Barbara, California
- Presbyterian Village North in Dallas, Texas
- John Knox Village of Florida in Pompano Beach, Florida

All five communities have also received the ICAA NuStep Pinnacle Award, signify-

ing the highest wellness achievement in senior living.

These senior living communities foster a culture of wellness that goes beyond just physical fitness and healthcare. They share certain features: a continuum of care, a large variety of classes and programs, breathtaking physical surroundings that are incorporated into the programming, partnerships with their local cultural and academic institutions, employee involvement in wellness activities, and a system that ensures continual response to resident feedback.

The International Council on Aging<sup>®</sup> joined with NuStep, LLC, a leading manufacturer of recumbent cross-trainers, in 2018 to develop a new opportunity for senior living communities to win recognition for creating and fostering a wellness culture. Launched in January 2019, the prestigious Beacon Award also allows recipients to position themselves competitively in a changing industry. To win the annual award, communities must demonstrate the ways in which they

meet the seven dimensions of wellness: emotional, physical, intellectual, social, spiritual, vocational and environmental. Every year the Beacon Award will recognize the 25 most deserving applicants.

One of the judges, Kate Mearns, director of Spa and Wellness for LIVUnLtd in New York, mentions she was tapped to judge the Beacon Awards because senior living leaders seek to incorporate some spa features that appeal to future residents. A universal theme among the top winners was "that wellness really is part of their DNA" and integrated into all of their programs, says Mearns. She also saw the concept of involving residents in the operations of many of the best communities she reviewed. Another judge, Carolyn Swope, director of Health Sciences at Delos Labs, adds that the top winners "actively strove to engage their residents, listen to their needs and promote participation in wellness activities and culture."

Previously, the *Journal on Active Aging*<sup>®</sup> featured an article on Moorings Park, the number one "Best in Wellness" community recognized by the 2019 ICAA NuStep awards program<sup>1</sup> (a full list of the 2019 award-winners appears on page 51). The four communities that round out the top five are profiled below for this issue.

## **Senior Resource Group: Maravilla Santa Barbara**

At Maravilla, the wellness culture starts from the top. Senior Resource Group (SRG) hired Dr. Sarah Matyko, OTD, OTR/L, as their corporate director of Life Enrichment three years ago to launch an evidence-based wellness program in the company's 32 communities throughout the United States. With a doctorate in behavioral science and a background in population health, Matyko believes that for a wellness program to succeed, it needs to be both science-based and rolled out in a way that's engaging. "Find out what residents are most interested in," is her motto.

To do this, SRG developed a program called ZEST™ that has become the lynchpin of wellness in all SRG communities, including Maravilla Santa Barbara. Based in research and best practices from multiple fields of discipline as well as a year's worth of resident input, ZEST stands out for the way it is designed to work for all residents, says Swope. One of the areas of research SRG drew from is "blue zones," five areas throughout the world with the highest concentrations of centenarians. One of the secrets to longevity in these areas is infusing movement into daily life, a principle SRG has taken to heart.

ZEST uses color psychology to make it easier for residents to identify types of activities, with each category designated a different color on the activity calendar. Mind-related pursuits, like lifelong-learning seminars, are blue; activities for the body, like fitness classes, are green; and soul-related activities, which include art classes and social hours, are pink.

Kelsey Roberts, Maravilla Santa Barbara's fitness director, comments that there's a strong sense of camaraderie as she encourages residents to try new types of activities. She's taken 87-year-old residents kayaking for the first time, and she's had them test out their right hooks at a Rock Steady Boxing class, which helps residents living with Parkinson's disease. "We're creating these remarkable experiences and giving them the confidence to say, 'Wow, I did it!'" Roberts says. Mearns notes that these types of new pursuits help residents step out of their comfort level and could help them grow both psychologically and physically.

Staff participation is also part of the SRG wellness culture. Matyko comments that having staff involved not only keeps them healthier; it also gets them more engaged, which helps decrease turnover—a huge issue in senior living communities. So Roberts starts the first 15 minutes of employees' days with an exercise routine.

The SRG wellness culture also extends to the availability of healthy food choices. The community's "Fresh ZEST" provides a plant-based item on every menu. Roberts says these items have been extremely



*Opportunities for active living abound on John Knox Village's 70-acre campus in Pompano Beach, Florida. Image courtesy of John Knox Village of Florida*

popular, thanks to the talents of a five-star chef. Mearns comments that introducing vegan options to a primarily meat and potatoes crowd represents "forward, progressive thinking." Since family members are likely to be more exposed to these diets, it's conducive to a positive intergenerational bonding experience, she adds.

In order to launch a successful wellness program, managers must frame it in a way that's not intimidating, Matyko advises, "because everything about wellness is so new to [residents]." However, she continues, wellness will be an expectation for the younger generation, many of whom are already lured to Maravilla because of this component. "ZEST is a competitive differentiator," says Matyko.

Maravilla's focus on wellness was a big draw for Jim McClure, 79, and his wife, Kathie, 77. McClure was impressed that the community had a fitness director, two pools and numerous fitness-related activities. Three years ago, they purchased a two-bedroom, two-bathroom cottage in the community's independent living space. Today, their days are filled with activities that include beach walks, bird watching and current events discussions. Every Thursday, the McClures mingle with neighbors at a social gathering. "The staff is wonderful, and the community is very welcoming," Jim says.

*Continued on page 50*

### **Let 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 <https://beaconaward.icaa.cc>. The deadline to apply is April 20, 2020.



# Beacons of excellence: Profiling winners in the wellness culture space

*Continued from page 49*



*A personal trainer oversees an exerciser in the Fitness Studio at John Knox Village, located at Pompano Beach, Florida. Image courtesy of John Knox Village of Florida*

## **Presbyterian Village North**

At Presbyterian Village North, wellness begins with an inclusive spirit. When Jude Hammett, 64, and her wife, Sue Sherrod, 78, were eyeing future residential prospects, they made certain to ask whether the community had any problems with their being lesbian. Hammett recalls that staff replied, “Absolutely not.” The couple moved to the community in October 2016. An avid swimmer, Hammett particularly enjoys the saltwater pool and exercise bikes that can be used in the pool. “It feels like you’re living on a cruise ship where you have all these things you can do, but you still have a neighborhood feeling and staff that are really concerned. They’re always

around trying to think of something new,” she says.

Hammett particularly appreciates the community’s Wellness University, a two-month program that provides new opportunities in addition to the community’s regular offerings. Shannon Radford, Presbyterian Village’s director of wellness, says it’s a chance to try things that are “a bit outside” the residents’ comfort zone. Previous destinations have included an escape room, a haunted ghost tour of an old city and a Battle of the Burgers, where residents judged the best burgers in Dallas. Wellness University has also provided lifelong-learning programs such as Do Well

Be Well Diabetes, Religions of the World, Musically Speaking-Contemporary Era, Master of Memory, and genealogy, cooking and tablet/computer classes.

Residents can choose from 80 fitness classes weekly. There’s also a Get Fit program for personal training. A per-session charge generates revenue for the program, providing salaries for seven full-time staff members with degrees in exercise physiology.<sup>2</sup>

Radford says she’s beginning to see younger people moving to the community who enjoy being active, so there’s an effort to stay on the forefront of the latest fitness trends.

An example is the use of a well-known “smart” training system for older adults,<sup>3</sup> which allows wellness staff to customize workouts and track progress. “It’s so user-friendly that tons of 90-year-olds use it,” she notes. There’s also an on-site clinic with specialists in geriatric care management. Residents have access to podiatry, dental, optometry and physician services.<sup>4</sup>

To those wanting to roll out a wellness program, Radford advises it is important to find ways to ensure the program is never dull. She continues to research and learn from others, and she isn’t afraid to try new things. This spring, by example, more than 100 residents will participate in a music-based mindfulness intervention pilot study with Texas Tech and Southern Methodist University.

Mearns comments that the Presbyterian Village mantra, “Don’t let fear of failure hold us back,” stood out to her when

judging the Beacon Awards. She says the best applicants were those who didn’t merely react to their residents’ needs: They introduced new modalities to stretch them.

### John Knox Village

John Knox, like the other top winners, prides itself on fostering a culture of “we and us” instead of “I and me.” That’s something that resident Ellen Isaacs, 72, sees every day. In addition to praising the friendly staff, Isaacs mentions neighbors have knocked on her door offering her a freshly picked mango or avocado from fruit trees nestled throughout resident properties. The atmosphere is invigorating. “At our age, you’re not usually making new friends,” she says.

All new employees receive “sensitivity training” so they can better understand hearing loss and visual impairment, states Monica McAfee, the community’s chief marketing and innovation officer. There

are also systems in place, including daily check-ins, to monitor when residents are having health-related issues and ensure sufficient support is provided. On Wellness Wednesdays, residents can work with professionals schooled in diet, nutrition and health.

John Knox’s tagline, “Where possibility plays,” is intended to convey the idea that residents can walk into their future in a new way, says McAfee. She highlights ArtSage, a month of events focused on the arts and humanities. They’ve brought in speakers from around the country, including the renowned Edward Villella, former artistic director of Miami City Ballet, and opera singer and Kennedy Center honoree Grace Bumbry.

Isaacs serves on the Resident Senate, where residents get updated on happenings in

*Continued on page 52*

## Beacons for the industry: 25 ‘Best in Wellness’ communities

The 2019 ICAA/NuStep award recipients bring wellness to many nuances of daily living in their communities. They are:

*Winners of the 2019 ICAA NuStep Beacon Award/ICAA NuStep Pinnacle Award*

1. Moorings Park (Naples, Florida)
2. **Senior Resource Group: Maravilla (Santa Barbara, California)**
3. **Presbyterian Village North (Dallas, Texas)**
4. **John Knox Village of Florida (Pompano Beach, Florida)**
5. **Sunnyside Retirement Community (Harrisonburg, Virginia)**

*Winners of the 2019 ICAA NuStep Beacon Award*

6. Vi Communities (Chicago, Illinois)
7. Touchmark on South Hill (Spokane, Washington)

8. Touchmark at the Ranch (Prescott, Arizona)
9. Galloway Ridge at Fearington (Pittsboro, North Carolina)
10. Sun Health Life Care (Sun City West, Arizona)
11. Touchmark at Harwood Groves (Fargo, North Dakota)
12. Vesta Properties: King Point (Sun City, Florida)
13. Senior Resource Group: Maravilla (Scottsdale, Arizona)
14. Still Hopes Episcopal Retirement Community (West Columbia, South Carolina)
15. Kavod Senior Life (Denver, Colorado)
16. The Hacienda at the River (Tucson, Arizona)
17. Juniper Village at Brookline (State College, Pennsylvania)
18. Touchmark Vancouver (Vancouver, Washington)

19. Friendship Village of Bloomington (Bloomington, Minnesota)
20. Touchmark in the West Hills (Portland, Oregon)
21. Westminster Woods on Julington Creek (St. Johns, Florida)
22. The Meth-Wick Community (Cedar Rapids, Iowa)
23. Willow Valley Communities (Lancaster, Pennsylvania)
24. Berwick Comox Valley (Comox Valley, British Columbia, Canada)
25. Tapestry at Wesbrook Village (Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada)

Profiles of the award-winners will appear in the *Journal on Active Aging*<sup>®</sup> throughout the year.

# Beacons of excellence: Profiling winners in the wellness culture space

*Continued from page 51*

the community and provide their input to management. “We are invited to speak our minds,” she notes. The result? Residents have succeeded in bringing a bird sanctuary and a pool lift to the community, and they are in the process of having charging stations installed for electric vehicles.

Echoing other Beacon Award winners, McAfee observes that senior living managers must constantly explore how to be innovative and nimble, responding to resident needs and changes in beneficial but unobtrusive ways. Plans at John Knox include hiring a coach to work with residents individually on their health and career goals. A new aquatic complex with a resort-style pool, a four-lane lap pool, an open air sports bar and grille, a 60-seat

indoor restaurant, and pickleball and bocce ball courts will open in September 2020.<sup>5</sup> A multipurpose performing arts center is also in the works.

## Sunnyside

Sunnyside Retirement Community pioneered a wellness program 25 years ago, well before it became mainstream. Annie Shaffer, Sunnyside’s wellness director, mentions that the program has evolved from being focused primarily on the fitness center to one where there’s no divide between activities and wellness. The focus is on creating a wellness culture on the campus and educating residents and staff alike as to what that means. Everyone from dining to maintenance and transportation staff is on board.

Physical fitness is still a Sunnyside cornerstone, however. Shaffer says that 72% of the independent living residents exercise at least twice a week, a number that has remained fairly consistent for the past 15 years.

A major development in Sunnyside’s wellness culture was a decision for the entire campus, including staff and residents, to go tobacco free beginning March 1, 2018. “We knew for tobacco users, it wasn’t going to be a happy day,” Shaffer comments. So that date was turned into an opportunity to celebrate wellness: Each department created its own station featuring activities like a yogurt bar, group meditations, yoga and smoking cessation information.

In another innovative program, residents were inspired to start their own virtual reality lab after being part of a research program at a local college. The community now has virtual reality headsets that allow residents the opportunity to experience virtual visits to nature trails or vacation destinations. As well, a new 13,000-sq.-ft. wellness center is due to be completed by the end of 2020, adding a second wellness facility to the existing one built 23 years ago.<sup>6</sup> The investment in a state-of-the-art center demonstrates the commitment to continually improve the wellness focus, Shaffer states.

Sunnyside prides itself on its “Spirit of Sunnyside,” which is intended to foster a family-like atmosphere. In reviewing the community’s Beacon Award application, Delos’s Swope sensed that spirit was genuine. And Joel and Rebecca Grow, whose choice of Sunnyside was mentioned previously, can attest to it: After Joel recently slipped on the ice and broke his pelvis, he called a Sunnyside staff person to request a grab bar. Within 10 minutes, two men had arrived to install it in his bathroom. “People have been so kind and reached out and brought food and walked the dog,” he says.

## Resources

### Internet

#### Delos

<https://delos.com>

#### ICAA NuStep Beacon Awards

<https://beaconaward.icaa.cc>

#### International Council on Active Aging (ICAA)

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

#### John Knox Village

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

#### LIVunLtd.

<https://livunltd.com>

#### Moorings Park

[www.mooringspark.org](http://www.mooringspark.org)

#### NuStep, LLC

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

#### Presbyterian Village North

[www.presvillagenorth.org/](http://www.presvillagenorth.org/)

#### Senior Resource Group: Maravilla Santa Barbara

[www.srgseniorliving.com/communities/santa-barbara-ca-maravilla](http://www.srgseniorliving.com/communities/santa-barbara-ca-maravilla)

#### Sunnyside Retirement Community

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

### Print

Abrahms, S. (2019). Meet Moorings Park: The #1 wellness-based community in North America. *Journal on Active Aging*, 18(7), 24–31; November/December issue. Available free online to ICAA members in the “Articles” archives [search using keywords “Moorings Park”] at [www.icaa.cc](http://www.icaa.cc)

The editors. (2019). Shining examples: ICAA and NuStep name 25 “Best in Wellness” communities. *Journal on Active Aging*, 18(7), 32–33. Available free online to ICAA members in the “Articles” archives [search using keywords “Shining examples”] at [www.icaa.cc](http://www.icaa.cc)





*Sunnyside Retirement Community will add a second wellness facility to augment amenities on its 100-acre campus in Harrisonburg, Virginia. Image courtesy of Sunnyside Communities*

### **The shift is happening**

Those at the forefront of an innovative, inclusive wellness culture shift in senior living believe the investment in wellness will pay big dividends. They predict the next generation of senior living residents will value these types of programs even more. LIVunLtd's Mearns agrees. In providing such an expansive wellness culture, these award-winning communities will have a competitive advantage. "The resident of the future is the spa guest of today," she says.

In fact, 64% of active-aging industry leaders already viewed wellness as a "must have" in ICAA's 2018 trends survey.<sup>7</sup> In a follow-up 2019 survey,<sup>8</sup> 305 senior living communities reaffirmed that leaders see the value of having a wellness culture that supports staff as well as residents, creating programs, environments and services that

promote wellness in the seven wellness dimensions. When nurtured as a whole, these dimensions can improve quality of life measurably for residents and staff alike. Benefits extend to families and communities as well.

The 2019 ICAA NuStep Beacon Award winners "prioritize wellness—and its pursuit—as an essential way of life," emphasize ICAA and NuStep, both longtime champions of older-adult wellness.<sup>9</sup> These communities demonstrate "remarkable strength in creating resident-staff partnerships to create meaningful opportunities that empower participants to improve their quality of life," the two companies say. By weaving wellness into the fabric of communities, SRG Maravilla Santa Barbara, John Knox Village, Presbyterian Village North and Sunnyside "provide innovation, inspiration and motivation for

engaging residents and staff in a wellness culture and journey." ❧

*Julie Halpert is a freelance journalist, author, journalism instructor and speaker. Halpert writes regularly for such publications as the New York Times and The Wall Street Journal. She has also contributed to The Atlantic, AARP, CNBC, Scientific American, The Washington Post, Family Circle, Real Simple, and many others. She is the coauthor of Making Up With Mom: Why Mothers and Daughters Disagree About Kids, Careers and Casseroles (and What to Do About It). A founder of The Society of Environmental Journalists, Halpert teaches environmental journalism at the University of Michigan. More information is available <https://juliehalpert.com>.*

*Continued on page 54*



# Beacons of excellence: Profiling winners in the wellness culture space

*Continued from page 53*



*With a clubhouse and lounge, spa and heated pool, fitness center, movie theaters and restaurants, residents benefit from the wellness amenities at Senior Resource Group's Maravilla Santa Barbara community. Image courtesy of SRG Maravilla Santa Barbara*

## References

1. Abrahms, S. (2019). Meet Moorings Park: The #1 wellness-based community in North America. *Journal on Active Aging*, 18(7), 24–31; November/December issue. Available free online to ICAA members in the “Articles” archives [search using keywords “Moorings Park”] at [www.icaa.cc](http://www.icaa.cc).
2. Bolthouse, T. (2019, July 23). How Charging for Personal Training is Funding this Community's Entire Wellness Staff. *HUR Heroes* blog. Retrieved from [blog.hurusa.com/hur-heroes/charging-for-personal-training](http://blog.hurusa.com/hur-heroes/charging-for-personal-training).
3. HUR USA. (n.d.). HUR SmartTOUCH. Retrieved from <https://hurusa.com/hur-solutions/smart-technology>.
4. Presbyterian Village North. (2020). Wellness. Retrieved from <https://www.presvillagenorth.org/wellness>.
5. John Knox Village. (2020, January 14). Vision Plan Projects Masterfully Transforming John Knox Village. Retrieved from <https://johnknoxvillage.com/2020/01/vision-plan-projects-masterfully-transforming-john-knox-village/>.
6. The editors. (2020). New Wellness Center on the Horizon. *Evergreen, The Magazine of Sunnyside Communities*. Winter issue. Retrieved from <https://www.sunnyside.cc/wp-content/uploads/Magazine-for-web.pdf>.
7. Ryan, P. (2018, October). Visions of the future: ICAA Active-Aging Industry Trends Survey 2018. Vancouver, BC: International Council on Active Aging. Available at [https://www.icaa.cc/listing.php?type=industry\\_research](https://www.icaa.cc/listing.php?type=industry_research).
8. Ryan, P. (2019, September). ICAA State of Wellness: Priorities and progress. Vancouver, BC: International Council on Active Aging. Available at [https://www.icaa.cc/listing.php?type=industry\\_research](https://www.icaa.cc/listing.php?type=industry_research).
9. International Council on Active Aging and NuStep, LLC. (2019). ICAA NuStep Beacon Best in Wellness Award. Available at <https://beaconaward.icaa.cc>