

## **Spirits and Engagement Up at 11 Senior Living Communities**

### ***IntegraCare Creatively Focuses on Employees, Residents and Families***

An emotional Lorenza Rossum sat on the second-floor outdoor balcony and watched his family members sing “Happy Birthday” as he celebrated his 89<sup>th</sup> birthday at The Woods at Cedar Run senior living community near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

“He’s used to having us there and we didn’t want him to think we forgot about him,” Lorenza’s son Oscar Rossum said on a chilly March afternoon.

Approximately 100 miles to the West, Colonial Courtyard at Bedford senior residents shared virtual hugs with family members and posted photographs, some of which went viral on social media. Occasionally, family members stood outside windows and waved to their loved ones inside.

“It’s perked up everybody’s spirits 100 percent,” said Heidi Brown, Colonial Courtyard at Bedford’s LifeStages Coordinator. “It’s one thing to do a week of social distancing, another thing to do two weeks. But at this point. ... We have had a lot of social media presence lately.”

Similar scenes have unfolded throughout IntegraCare’s 11 senior living communities located in Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia.

The COVID-19 pandemic has altered lives throughout the world over the past few months and the crisis will continue to impact us for perhaps years to come. Fortunately, IntegraCare to date has not had a confirmed case of COVID-19 among its 677 residents, leadership teams or employees.

Since the outset of the pandemic, IntegraCare has followed guidelines set by the CDC. The team has implemented visitor restrictions put in place by the federal government and individual state governors. IntegraCare placed the health, safety and well-being of its residents and employees front and center early in the process.

“The COVID-19 crisis has been life-changing for everyone,” said IntegraCare President Loriann Putzier. “We know this is a challenging time for our teams and we want to let them know how much their hard work, self-sacrifice and service to the residents means to us.”

IntegraCare has had a 94% employee retention rate since March 16, when all 11 communities began restricting visitors. This high level of retention compared to industry standards results in more consistent safety protocols and reduces risk for both residents and team members. It boosts morale for team members and improves satisfaction for families.

“We often say it’s a great place to live because it’s a great place to work,” Putzier said. “Our employees go above and beyond the call of duty. We appreciate all that they do to improve the lives of our residents and their families.”

IntegraCare built a five-week schedule of employee rewards and engagement activities. Those ranged from meals for team members delivered by local businesses affected by the COVID-19 situation; to 1,230 homemade-style pies given to team members’ families; to all 615 employees receiving a plastic Easter egg filled with varying amounts of money – from \$5 to \$100 -- or a one-week vacation voucher.

“The pandemic changed a lot of things, but we’re still the same collaborative group of people working to make life better for our residents,” Putzier said. “We’re not only a team, but also a family.”

The Pittsburgh-based leadership team, which was forced to work from home as a result of Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf’s order, implemented a weekly engagement initiative. IntegraCare leaders each adopted a community and interacted through social media and traditional contacts. Zoom meetings and interactions became the norm.

“You get to know people whose spouses have lost work, whose kids are home from school,” Putzier said. “You want to help in any way possible. Each member of our leadership team has delivered a personal, hand-written thank you card to each staff member in our communities. We’ve received a huge response. It’s been very humbling.”

IntegraCare has put a rigorous focus on the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) throughout the company.

“We are constantly working with vendors to ensure we have enough on hand and we have been sharing between our communities as necessary,” Putzier said of Personal Protective Equipment. “Our employees have chosen the most noble occupation that we know of and we want to make sure that we have done and are doing everything in our power to ensure that they have the tools they need to protect themselves and our residents.”

IntegraCare remains vigilant.

“We monitor team members upon their arrival for signs and symptoms,” Putzier said. “We work through our Employee Assistance Program for challenged team members. We host daily huddles with the team to check in on the morale and other potential team member needs. This is a measured approach between engagement and process.”

Bi-weekly leadership calls focus on the latest developments and create a universal method to roll out new programs and procedures or to introduce vendors. IntegraCare also utilizes a peer-to-peer network.

All of this team support leads to excellent care for the residents.

Many family members who are unable to visit residents turned to the virtual hugs to share messages with their loved ones or team members. Through mid-April, 329 virtual hugs and 178 virtual visits had been made via a portal on the IntegraCare website.

The COVID-19 pandemic won't stop the caring or the acts of kindness.

For instance, at Newhaven Court at Clearview in Butler, Pennsylvania, the team crafted and filled 105 Easter baskets -- one for each resident. Each basket had a special message to the recipient.

At Hunters Woods at Trails Edge in Reston, Virginia, team members and residents followed social distancing policies while making blankets to be donated to a local animal shelter.

There still is time for some fun, too. Candle Light Cove in Easton, Maryland, held a "Rock 'em-Sock 'em" balloon event. The residents were situated 6 or more feet apart in their chairs and took turns pushing the balloons across the room and through the hallway.

"Our teams at the communities have implemented creative, but safe activities for our residents," Putzier said. "We want them to have fun but we adhere to current CDC infection control procedures and social distancing limitations."