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Kisco's 100 Ways to Wellness encourages residents to 'dare to make a change'

Jointly developed in three Kisco Senior Living communities, this wellness incentive program challenged residents, family members and staff associates to be more active, engaged and adventurous

This is the second article in a series profiling the recipients of the 2009 ICAA Innovators Awards. Presented by the International Council on Active Aging®, these awards honor excellence and creativity

in the active-aging field, and recognize organizations that have created cutting-edge offerings. In 2005, the awards program expanded to include the Equipment Innovator category. ICAA is an association that supports professionals who develop wellness and fitness facilities and services for adults 50 and over.

In 1990, when Andrew Kohlberg bought Kisco Senior Living's first retirement community, "two thoughts emerged as the driving force" for the then-30-year-old company founder and president: "If

my parents were to live in a retirement community, what would I want it to be like? And how would I want them to be treated?" These concepts have profoundly influenced the Kisco philosophy, according to the senior living provider's website.

The Carlsbad, California-based company has articulated a vision to "create communities where residents and employees share passions, live and work in balance, and leave a legacy." To make this vision a reality, it follows guiding principles of integrity, dignity and compassion. Kisco commits specifically to enhancing "each resident's lifestyle by responding immediately to residents' needs and concerns, offering high-quality creatively designed programs, encouraging independence, and promoting a sense of community and friendship."

Although Kisco now owns and operates 19 communities in six states, the company strives to maintain its personal approach, states the company website. "We continuously reevaluate and refine our methods. We treat people with kindness and respect." And "we work to create environments that are inviting to residents, their families, and friends," the site explains.

In a 2007 article in *Smart Business San Diego*, Kohlberg talked about shaping Kisco's culture. "We said from the very beginning, if we're going to spend the time to create something, we have to spend the time to have it incorporated in everything we do," he commented. "The hard part is not establishing the vision and mission. The hard part is getting it through the fabric of the organization to every level and making it a living and breathing part of the organization, rather than something that sits on the wall."

One example of the senior living provider's success in this endeavor is its dynamic whole-person wellness culture. Fostered by Kisco's The Art of Living WellSM philosophy, wellness includes all aspects of community life, and is "part of everything we do," the company affirms online, "from the programs we offer to the services we provide."



(L to r), Nicki Grudzinskas, Leigh Grimes and Allison Pait developed and jointly implemented the 100 Ways to Wellness program in three Kisco communities in North Carolina in 2008

In North Carolina's Piedmont Triad Region, three Kisco communities collaborated to promote "living well" in 2008 with the 100 Ways to Wellness challenge. The six-month program—developed by wellness directors Nicki Grudzinskas, Allison Pait and Leigh Grimes, of Heritage Woods, Abbotswood at Irving Park and Heritage Greens respectively—inspired participants to be more active, engaged and adventurous. Daring individuals to make a change, the program's slogan reinforced the message that it's never too late to explore and accomplish new things. Overall, the residents, family members and staff associates at the three Triad communities received the initiative so well that Kisco later rolled out the program at several other locations.

To learn more about 100 Ways to Wellness, the *Journal on Active Aging*[®] recently asked Grudzinskas, Pait and Grimes to tell us about their program, and how they developed and implemented it jointly in their communities.

JAA: *Let's first talk about wellness in Kisco communities. How do you define wellness?*

LG: Our website defines wellness as "the combination of many factors that both strengthen and enhance the mind, body and spirit and involves the whole human experience encompassing the primary aspects of a healthy lifestyle: emotional, intellectual, physical, social, spiritual and vocational." We believe that "our wellness

programs ... bring a new lifestyle perspective, an optimistic outlook, and a can-do attitude for both residents and associates."

JAA: *How would you describe the 100 Ways to Wellness initiative?*

AP: Our 100 Ways to Wellness program was a list of 100 wellness tasks designed to inspire residents to step outside their comfort zones and engage in life in very meaningful ways. This wellness initiative was designed as an incentive program—something our three communities collaborate on annually. It was perhaps our most successful effort to date in terms of truly holistic wellness programming and addressing "The Art of Living Well."

NG: The key programming element of 100 Ways was its focus on all six dimensions of wellness. We wanted this challenge to be much more holistic than a traditional physical activity incentive program. To that point, we hoped to reach a much greater audience.

JAA: *How did you develop and implement the program in your three communities?*

LG: The beginnings of 100 Ways to Wellness were a bit unorthodox. The idea sprang from the television show "My Name is Earl" and from the 2007 motion picture *The Bucket List*, which gave us

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Five key lessons learned in providing 100 Ways to Wellness

1. Many times older adults are apprehensive about trying new things. With a little encouragement, they can overcome this hurdle and find great satisfaction in succeeding at something they thought difficult or even impossible.
2. A holistic wellness incentive has much greater appeal than a fitness-specific program.
3. Journaling about their accomplishments was a positive experience for participants and sparked a lot of conversation. Further, this piece of the program added another level of intellectual and emotional wellness.
4. Self-paced incentive programs attract greater participation—100 Ways to Wellness appealed both to those who prefer independent projects and to those who enjoy group programming.
5. Three minds are better than one! The three Triad Kisco communities collaborate yearly on incentive programs/National Senior Health and Fitness day projects. Our pooled resources (both ideas and financial resources) greatly enhance our offerings. This collaboration also allows our residents to make connections and friendships with folks outside their community.

the idea of creating a “wellness-specific bucket list.” We wanted a list of tasks that would challenge participants to do things that reflected our six-dimension philosophy of wellness, but also would, at times, push individuals out of their comfort zones. Our original list had more than 150 wellness tasks. Ultimately, we whittled it down to an even 100. A participant booklet was then designed that contained these tasks, and provided room for individuals to journal their thoughts and reflections as they completed each one.

Program implementation started with a kickoff party at a local park. The event, held the last Wednesday in May, took place in conjunction with National Senior Health and Fitness Day, and featured a wellness fair, a guest speaker, and a wonderful cookout lunch. Residents who came to the kickoff each received the booklet/journal, as well as a change purse screen-printed with the slogan “Dare to Make a Change.”

The 100 Ways to Wellness challenge continued for the remainder of the year. Each month we held a group program at one of our three communities to support residents in completing some of the wellness tasks. Transportation was provided so individuals from the other two communities could attend.

To give individuals a little extrinsic motivation to continue on their wellness journey, monthly raffles were organized at each community. Residents filled out an entry ticket and dropped it in a bucket each time they completed a task—so the more tasks they completed, the better chance they had to win prizes.

JAA: Why was it important to offer activities ranging from easy to challenging across the wellness dimensions? And why did you want participants to reflect on their experiences?

AP: Kisco's Art of Living Well philosophy challenges residents to do things that

strengthen every facet of the human being in order to achieve balance. The varying levels of difficulty not only played a role in getting the residents motivated to begin this journey, but also kept them interested in following it through to the conclusion. And the journaling aspect really pulled everything together. By writing about their experiences in the 100 Ways booklet, participants were able to reflect on what they had accomplished during the program and what this meant to them. One resident, for example, wrote about her sense of pride in trying new things.



In keeping with Kisco's guiding principles, the 100 Ways to Wellness program promoted a sense of community and friendship

JAA: How did you engage residents in the initiative?

NG: Most of our residents know we roll out our annual incentive program on National Senior Health and Fitness Day each year, and they get excited about the day's events—they look forward to spending time with people from the other Triad communities and enjoying an afternoon at the park with a cookout. But even though residents anticipated the program, each community still advertised it through flyers and newsletters, just to be sure we got the word out. In addition, we kept promotional materials on file throughout the remainder of the year, so we could inform residents who moved in to our communities or those who were unable to make the rollout event.

JAA: What challenges did you encounter along the way in developing, implementing

and sustaining the program? And how did you address them?

LG: As pointed out earlier, we wanted some of the tasks to push people out of their comfort zone, but we also realized we would need to give them support to make them feel successful. For instance, one of the tasks was “Sing a song in front of an audience.” To help people complete this task, we scheduled karaoke a few times throughout the remainder of the year. The monthly group program, in which all three communities participated, helped address these more challenging tasks. We also realized that 100 tasks might be overwhelming to some people, so we promoted the program as a self-paced endeavor. We had no strict rules when it came to completing a task and the journaling aspect was kept completely private.

A final challenge was funding for the program—specifically, paying for the production of the booklets. We addressed this challenge by selling advertisement space in the booklet, which more than offset the cost of production and also paid for the change purses.

JAA: *What impact did the multicomunity aspect have on the program?*

LG: It was a huge asset to be able to combine our efforts. There were the practical reasons for pooling our resources, budget and time—for example, tackling a project this large would have been very time-consuming for one person. From the participants’ perspective, residents had a chance to meet other older adults with like-minded interests, to make new friends, and to visit other Kisco communities.

JAA: *What goals did you strive to achieve with 100 Ways to Wellness, and what were the final results?*

LG: In regards to participation, we hoped to have 150 people take on the

challenge, and we easily met that goal. Another goal was to dispel the myth that older adults cannot learn anything new, so, on a deeper level, we hoped that participants would try new things, be open-minded, and maybe even find a new passion. We heard many comments from those who completed the program that led us to believe people did indeed find new interests and passions.

JAA: *In the end, how did 100 Ways to Wellness support “living well” for residents at your three communities?*

NG: The whole concept of 100 Ways was derived from Kisco’s Art of Living Well initiative. We wanted participants to understand that there is more to “wellness” than just being physically active. We tried to choose tasks that spoke to good nutrition, keeping in touch with the people in one’s life, giving back to the community, lifelong learning, the importance of reminiscing, and being spiritually healthy. We even introduced the participants to Kisco’s green initiative and taught ways to be environmentally conscious.



‘Plant a seed and help it grow’ was among the 100 tasks included in the Kisco wellness challenge

JAA: *Why do you think 100 Ways to Wellness succeeded? What were the key contributors in your view?*

AP: This program was different from all the other incentive programs that we have designed. It was not simply an incentive to increase physical activity; it was truly whole person in design. This

broader appeal really increased participation. Not only was this something that every resident could do, it also helped get family members and Kisco associates engaged in our communities and thinking about overall well-being. Participants also learned that they could have an impact on many levels, benefiting themselves, their neighbors, their communities and their world. ☺

The Journal on Active Aging thanks Nicki Grudzinskas, Allison Pait and Leigh Grimes of Kisco Senior Living for their help with this article. For more information about Kisco, visit the company’s website at www.kiscoseniorliving.com.

References

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Images courtesy of Kisco Senior Living

100 Ways to Wellness: a sampling of tasks

- Attend three exercise classes a week.
- Commit to bringing your own coffee mug instead of using Styrofoam.
- Invite your neighbor over for coffee.
- Learn to send an email.
- Plant a seed and help it grow.
- Sing a song in front of an audience.
- Write to your congressman about an issue that concerns you.