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Emerson House offers unique memory care

Article provided by Emerson House for Oregonian Media Group Marketing

All those sayings about 50 being the new 40 or 70 the new 60 have never been more true. Who knew that they could also apply to memory care communities?

At 17 years old, some might expect that a community like Emerson House, located at 3577 SE Division St., to seem dated. But with Oregon Health Care Association awards for Executive Director and Nurse of the Year, a full slate of activities and national media attention, it's never been more vibrant.

"We joke that this isn't your grandmother's memory care," says Melissa Fisher, Emerson House Community Relations Director. While people may not understand what a memory care community does - serve the needs of people with Alzheimer's and other types of medical dementias - nearly everyone has a stereotyped idea of what such a place might look like.

At Emerson House, the stereotypes quickly fade. Modern furnishings, bright colors and huge windows fill the living spaces. "There were some deliberate de-

isions made when our community was built based on all the best research on dementia at the time. Those findings have continued to hold up," says Fisher.

The building's circular floor plans and open great room areas were designed to enhance quality of life. "We are unique in that we have three different residential environments for different stages of dementia, from early stage to late stage," explains Fisher. Some residents require minimal help while others are totally dependent on staff.

An intentional choice in the building design was to make almost all of the resident rooms shared spaces. "Studies show that isolation can speed the decline for people with dementia, says Fisher. She adds that residents are encouraged to be part of the community, participating and helping with activities, and caring for themselves as much as possible, but with the safety of 24/7 specially trained staff.

"There is a common misconception that Memory Care means the end of life for people - that they're here because they can do no more.

We like to think it's the beginning of their new lives, and to focus on improving the quality of life for each person that lives here," says Fisher.

In March, Emerson House was featured on CNN's "Vital Signs" program in a story on the use of therapy llamas and alpacas in care settings. But visits by therapy llamas are only one part of an award-winning life enrichment program. Emerson House's activities calendar also lists trivia games, discussion groups, outings to art exhibits, wildlife sanctuaries and museums in partnership with Urban Excursions, art therapy, daily exercises, music therapy, gardening, yoga dance, cooking, and parties.

In 2016, the Oregon Health Care Association honored Erin Jones, Executive Director, and Julia Arnold, MSN RN and Health Services Director, at their annual awards ceremony, which recognizes outstanding individuals from senior communities around the state. Jones was honored as Executive Director of the Year and Arnold was awarded Nurse of the Year.

These honors have helped to es-

tablish Emerson House as an education leader. Each quarter, Jones hosts a group of Oregon Health Sciences University students, answering their questions about the different types and stages of dementia and helping them understand the disease from the viewpoint of people who have it.

"This is an important experience for any doctor or student and should be done more often," said one participating student. "How are doctors supposed to understand many of their elderly patients' lives and needs if they never spend any time with said patient population in their personal settings?" Another student commented, "This was an amazing experience. I liked that we were able to participate in an activity session with the residents."

Emerson House owners and founders Alan Kinsel and Jim Ameri of Kinsel Ameri Properties, Inc. (based in Lake Oswego) have remained actively involved in the business. Unlike most senior communities, Emerson House had never had a management company to assist with day-to-day operations. But as Kinsel Ameri added

senior properties in other states, the benefits of such a relationship became apparent. After researching several companies, they chose Northstar Senior Living, for their ability to bring together the leadership, systems and culture that had been so important to Emerson House's previous success. Northstar provides management and consulting services to independent assisted living and memory care communities in nine states as well as Mexico.

So what's next for Emerson House? The community is starting a monthly memory café, in partnership with Elderplace and Housecall Providers, for people who are caring for a loved one with dementia at home. Emerson House will also be participating in the Southeast Area Art Walk in March, with a showcase of resident artwork.

For more information about these events or to schedule a tour, contact Melissa Fisher at 503-234-8585. Emerson House's monthly rent, which includes all care needs, medication management, meals, laundry, housekeeping and activities, starts at \$5,155.



EMERSON HOUSE

Excellence in Memory Care for a Life with Dignity



- Person-centered care that respects an individual's relationships, life experiences, abilities and preferences
- Three residential environments allow us to match the living situation to each person's care, abilities and social needs
- Dementia Positive Community



- Family involvement and support
- Award winning activity program, including outings around Portland and beyond
- Barrier-free floor plan provides easy access to shared living, dining, activity and outdoor areas
- Delicious, seasonally inspired meals



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