



At the apex:

‘Best in Wellness’ senior living communities

These ICAA NuStep Pinnacle Award winners are leaders in making wellness an integral part of community life

This article is the first in a two-part Journal on Active Aging® series spotlighting the senior living communities recognized with the ICAA NuStep “Best in Wellness” Awards for 2023. In addition to the 25 ICAA NuStep Beacon Award winners listed in this article, the series features five communities that received the ICAA NuStep Pinnacle Award. Another series will follow profiling award-winning wellness executives.



Splendido at Rancho Vistoso, Mather's Arizona life plan community in the Oro Valley, features wellness opportunities and built spaces that reflect its natural surroundings. Image courtesy of Mather/Splendido at Rancho Vistoso

As research continues to broaden our understanding of the value of active aging, and technology expands our capabilities and offerings (custom analysis of sleep, for example), opportunities proliferate to enhance wellness cultures. Also driving this evolution of wellness is a continuing shift in perceptions about older adults' abilities and potential, along with their own increased expectations.

Years ago, "wellness" in senior living might mean a stand-alone chair aerobics program. Today's offerings, in contrast, can include high-tech fitness equipment that personalizes workouts and cutting-edge recovery

tools like percussion devices, compression boots and more. Additionally, expanding opportunities in multiple dimensions create the foundation for wellness that many communities now embrace.

"We are seeing a significant advancement not only in the desire to deliver wellness environments, but also in the sophistication of offerings," says Colin Milner, founder and CEO of the International Council on Active Aging® (ICAA). "Not only are there more products and services to bring forth a wellness culture, but they're becoming more customized and unique."

Evidence of this progression is prevalent among the winners of the 2023 ICAA NuStep Beacon Award. These 25 senior living communities exemplify North America's "Best in Wellness," with the top five also honored with the ICAA NuStep Pinnacle Award for exemplary achievements.

Established in 2019, the joint awards program celebrates communities committed to making wellness an integral part of their organizational fabric and fostering environments where wellness supports aging well.

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Bella Vista Terrace offers al fresco dining for residents of Splendido at Rancho Vistoso, located between the Santa Catalina and Tortolita Mountains in Arizona’s Oro Valley. Diners enjoy the scenic views and Mediterranean-inspired dishes. Image courtesy of Mather/Splendido at Rancho Vistoso

The program applauds 2023’s winners and the excellence they have demonstrated on their wellness journeys.

“What these communities have in common is the ability to offer transformative experiences that markedly enhance quality of life,” Milner states. “And as knowledge grows and the number of solutions increase, everyone continues to up their game.”

The Pinnacle/Beacon Awards’ top-ranked community for 2023, Asbury Solomons in Solomons, Maryland, will be featured in an upcoming *Journal on Active Aging*® issue. Here, we highlight the other communities that received a Pinnacle Award as role models of thriving wellness cultures in senior living.

Splendido at Rancho Vistoso (Tucson, Arizona)

Owned and managed by Illinois-based Mather, Splendido at Rancho Vistoso uses Mather Institute’s Person-Centric Wellness

Model (PCWM) as its wellness compass to design and implement initiatives, programs and services. The PCWM emphasizes autonomy, affiliation and achievement as the basis of individual and systemic well-being.

“Our wellness model supports each individual’s unique journey, and they choose what is most important to them,” says William Myers, the assistant vice president of wellness strategies at Mather. “We focus on wellness citizenship, which considers both the individual’s responsibility to contribute to the community, along with the community’s responsibility to support overall wellness.”

After residents meet with a wellness coach to develop a personal wellness plan, they can take advantage of multiple opportunities within the community, which has won three Pinnacle Awards in consecutive years (2021–2023).

Among the newer options is Figurati (Italian for “to imagine”), which features

immersive experiences like evening meditation, outdoor yoga, tai chi and sound bathing. At the Saluté spa, the Gharieni Welnamis wave bed promotes relaxation and stress relief through sound vibration therapy. Approximately half the residents and employees who initially tested the bed reported reduced stress, improved mental focus and decreased anxiety.

The fitness center offers another high-tech solution. The InBody body composition analyzer uses bioelectrical impedance technology to measure body fat. In a pilot study with InBody, users of the device showed greater motivation to make health-promoting behavior changes, such as cardiovascular and strength-training exercise.

“We encourage experiences that are multi-dimensional, relevant and on-trend,” Myers says. “Our culture of wellness fosters sustained curiosity, personal transformation and the creation of something ‘Nextaordinary™’ for those who live and work with us.”



With Juniper Village at Chatham in Chatham, New Jersey, Juniper Communities is among the senior living providers that pioneered building to US Green Building Council standards, incorporating low VOC [Volatile Organic Compounds] materials. Image courtesy of Juniper Communities

Myers points out that “residents are creators, not just consumers of culture; they are participants in the human experience, not just recipients of care.” The community uses the arts as a tool for connection, communication and cultural contribution, he adds, “recognizing the importance of coming together to experience and create music, dance, poetry, art and storytelling.”

Another part of that human experience is the Splendido Intellectual Pursuits Program (SIPP), in which residents lead classes on a variety of topics to support lifelong learning. And Splendido capitalizes on its scenic location to facilitate wellness in nature through walking trails, forest bathing, an outdoor saline swimming pool and an 18-hole putting green.

The community assesses its wellness offerings not only by measuring participation, but also by considering optimism, purpose and life satisfaction, which helps inform future programming. “Wellness is the most

exciting part of senior living today,” Myers says. “Splendido is helping change the narrative and showing that senior living offers one of the best options for aging well.”

Juniper Village at Chatham (Chatham, New Jersey)

With a mission to foster active bodies, engaged minds and fulfilled spirits, Juniper Village at Chatham is committed to “nurturing the spirit of life” so residents live their “third act” to the fullest. Owned and operated by Juniper Communities in Bloomfield, New Jersey, this first-time Pinnacle Award-winning community currently has about 100 residents in supportive independent living and assisted living.

Here, wellness is based on Juniper Communities’ Catalyst program, which encompasses offerings focused on the seven dimensions of wellness to empower personalized experiences. This includes forest bathing, Slow Birding [a bird-watching approach to connect more with birds and nature],

horticulture club, app fun with *New York Times*’ games like Wordle and Spelling Bee, music therapy and more.

“Staff meet one-on-one with each resident to learn their interests,” says Lynn Sysock, RN, director of wellness at Juniper’s Chatham community. “Our custom programming always stretches the boundaries of standard senior living fare.”

Some programming comes through partnerships, including:

- piloting Music Theater International’s Broadway Senior program
- teaming with the Geocaching Club of Northern New Jersey to be a local hub for geocacher gatherings [Ed. Geocaching uses devices with GPS (Global Positioning System) as a tool for outdoor treasure hunts.]
- working with a local university to offer new learning opportunities

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At Juniper Village at Chatham, New Jersey, the Catalyst ‘ecosystem of programs and services’ uses integrative technology to support wellness, with a Wellness Concierge hosted at the Catalyst Well-Being Center. Image courtesy of Juniper Communities

- serving on the Mayor’s Wellness Council to promote ways to age well

Additional amenities at Juniper Village at Chatham include a state-of-the-art fitness center, full-service spa, movie theater, and new bar and lounge. Walking paths, meditation areas, volunteer opportunities, resident-led programs and an herb garden further expand wellness options. Indoor and outdoor activity areas feature options like pool tables or cornhole.

Another signature Juniper Communities offering is Connect4Life, a high-tech, high-touch one-stop shop for primary care, specialty care and therapy services. It is integrated through electronic health records and coordinated by a medical concierge. Sysock reports that Connect4Life has simplified residents’ lives and reduced hospitalizations by seven percent.

The community embraces technology to enhance convenience and connectedness. For example, residents use Amazon’s Alexa voice technology to request information and participate in video calls with family and friends. Amazon Echo devices deliver digital in-room signage to prompt daily engagement.

As a further nod to wellness, Juniper Village at Chatham was built to the US Green Building Council’s standards, using low VOC (Volatile Organic Compounds) materials. The community features continuous flow around the hallways, rooms facing outward to nature or inward to natural light, and the Bistro Café and lounge opening onto the rose garden.

While the programs and facility facilitate a thriving wellness culture, Sysock points to another powerful influence: the community’s team. “Many of our associates have worked here since we opened 20 years ago,

and you feel our cohesive environment the moment you walk in,” she says. “They make it warm and inviting, and the feeling of home and family permeate the air.”

Bridgewater Retirement Community (Bridgewater, Virginia)

Launched as a small nursing home in 1958, Bridgewater Retirement Community (BRC) today is a 96-acre community with residents in independent living, assisted living, memory support and nursing households. BRC, which won its first Pinnacle Award in 2023, embraces compassion, innovation and stewardship as it promotes engaging lifestyles that “enhance and energize healthy living.”

“We take a 360-degree approach to wellness and are intentional about enhancing health and quality of life in all dimensions,” says Laura Spicer, vice president of well-being at BRC. “Living well means feeling



At Bridgewater Retirement Community, a life plan community in Bridgewater, Virginia, the May Meadows Library houses an extensive collection of books, periodicals, and local, regional and national newspapers. Image courtesy of Bridgewater Retirement Community

truly at home, with healthy and delicious food, stimulating activity, beautiful surroundings, creativity, human connection and a higher purpose.”

That starts with the community’s surroundings. “Our location brings many benefits, including clean air and water, natural beauty, a welcoming and safe local community and a variety of cultural opportunities,” Spicer says.

Within BRC, wellness in nature is found in the Retreat courtyard and meditation garden, walking trails and a community garden with family plots. The walking trails and community and wellness gardens were recently developed and funded by the BRC Foundation’s LiveWell campaign. With a goal of USD\$2.5 million, the campaign far surpassed that amount to raise USD\$5 million.

“For the first time, we asked our community to support the belief that we can enhance wellness and quality of life by

expanding programs and opportunities for residents, team members and the greater community,” Spicer explains. “The impact of this campaign is truly transformative in funding innovative projects that span all dimensions of well-being.”

Campaign funds also have supported a massage studio, farmer’s market, garden club and the first-ever overnight trip for residents in assisted living, memory support and nursing households.

Residents can find their niche in multiple interest groups and clubs for music, singing, bridge, billiards, quilting, books and more. Stargazers can enjoy the Starwerks observatory with astronomical telescopes and a viewing deck. Plus, BRC offers an art studio, woodworking studio, and fitness center with group classes and personal training.

Additional wellness amenities are housed at the Houff Community Center. Among them:

- May Meadows Library, featuring an extensive collection of books, periodicals and local, regional and national daily newspapers
- Back on Track Therapeutic Massage Center
- Maple Grove Salon and Salon@302
- Cottage Gifts volunteer-run gift shop
- Pharmacy

Cottage Gifts and the ReRun Shoppe sell items to support the BRC Foundation’s Forever Family Fund, which ensures that every BRC resident enjoys security and support, even if they have exhausted their financial resources.

“BRC stands out because of our uniquely person-first culture,” Spicer says. “Relationships and a strong sense of community are at the heart of everything we do, nurturing

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In Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley, the 93-acre Bridgewater Retirement Community campus includes walking trails and community gardens, as well as a meditation garden and a covered pavilion—a popular site for social events. Image courtesy of Bridgewater Retirement Community

an environment where individuals can truly thrive and enjoy a vibrant quality of life.”

John Knox Village of Florida (Pompano Beach, Florida)

Established in 1967, John Knox Village (JKV) of Florida, Inc., is committed to whole-person wellness to maximize longevity in its life plan community. The community, which celebrated winning its fourth Pinnacle Award in 2023, currently serves approximately 1,000 residents in independent living, assisted living, supportive memory care, and skilled nursing and rehabilitation.

“Wellness is not a one-size-fits-all program, and our holistic approach can help nourish physical, emotional and mental health at each stage of life,” says Kim Ali, vice president of sales and marketing at JKV. “By taking care of the whole person, we create opportunities to thrive and enrich the quality of life for all residents.”

That mission is evident in a packed calendar of monthly events that includes lifelong learning; health fairs; outings to local museums, theaters and restaurants; social activities; multi-generational programming; and a variety of live performances in the 380-seat Cultural Arts Center. Residents also run clubs such as IT and Me, auxiliary services, LGBT Pride Social Network and an improv acting troupe.

On the 70-acre tropical campus are walking trails with lakeside views, bike paths and several terraces, plus a rose garden and a dog park. The Aquatic Complex features two pools, a Jacuzzi, pickleball courts, bocce ball and poolside dining. Residents also can enjoy the fitness center, woodworking shop, stained glass studio, art studio, beauty salon, spa and eight libraries.

The new Westlake apartment homes, which opened in February 2024, have added amenities for all JKV residents. Among these amenities are: a technology hub, high-tech projection theatre, fitness center, art studio,

spiritual space, club room, casual restaurant and coffee and wine bar.

“JKV embraces the seven dimensions of wellness, and our Life Enrichment team intentionally engages in different activities that touch on each of these dimensions to bolster well-being,” Ali says. For residents of healthcare settings, JKV has expanded Meaningful Life wellness programming. New team members provide activities and companionship to help prevent these individuals from feeling isolated.

Routine medical care—including physicals, immunizations and vaccinations, lab services and chronic disease management—is available on-site for residents and staff members at The Center for Healthy Living. It offers fitness assessments, diet and nutrition assistance, life coaching, and yoga and meditation courses as well.

As a testament to JKV’s popularity, its census has remained in the mid- to high-



Pickleball courts at the Aquatic Complex encourage fitness and play at John Knox Village of Florida life plan community in Pompano Beach, Florida. Image courtesy of John Knox Village of Florida, Inc.

90th percentile. “Through thoughtful consideration, a one-on-one approach, and a willingness to act on resident feedback and suggestions, we have been able to maintain these high numbers even during challenging economic times,” Ali points out. “JKV is far from static, and for more than 50 years, we have enabled seniors to plan for their future healthcare needs while enjoying an enriched, wellness-based lifestyle.”

Reimagining aging

Senior living originally was established as a care-only model. Today, the foundation is increasingly being built on wellness with care, promoting holistic well-being that helps older adults live better longer.

“Wellness is taking center stage in senior living communities as a dynamic, continually evolving model,” says Jane Benskey, marketing communications specialist at NuStep, LLC, the Plymouth, Michigan-based manufacturer of inclusive fitness equipment. “We are delighted to honor so

many communities that are boldly leading the way by enriching lives and reimagining how we age.”

Julie King, MS, has been a certified group exercise instructor and personal trainer for more than 25 years. She holds multiple certifications and a master’s degree in science (kinesiology). Over her career, King has led virtually every class format—including indoor cycling, mat pilates, yoga, kickboxing, boot camp and aquatics—at commercial health clubs, corporate fitness centers, wellness centers, schools and online. She also has served as a fitness director, fitness/wellness coordinator, health club manager and a contributing editor for Club Business International magazine. King has been published in Club Industry, Club Solutions, Campus Recreation, National Fitness Trade Journal, Recreation Management and Fitness Management. She can be reached at julie.king1@comcast.net.

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Resources

Internet

ICAA NuStep “Best in Wellness” Awards (Beacon and Pinnacle Awards)
<https://beaconaward.icaa.cc>

International Council on Active Aging (ICAA)
www.icaa.cc

NuStep, LLC
www.nustep.com

Award-winners

Asbury Solomons
<https://www.asbury.org/asbury-solomons/>

Bridgewater Retirement Community
<https://brcliving.org/>

John Knox Village of Florida
<https://johnknoxvillage.com>

Juniper Village at Chatham
<https://junipercommunities.com/community/assisted-living-chatham/>

Splendido at Rancho Vistoso
<https://splendidotucson.com/>

Publications

The editors. (2023). “Best in Wellness” communities and CEOs named for 2023. *Journal on Active Aging*, 22(5), 39. Available to ICAA members in the “Articles” archives [“Wellness articles,” “Industry development” category] at www.icaa.cc

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Residents can choose personal coaching or group fitness classes led by licensed professionals in the fitness center at John Knox Village of Florida in Pompano Beach, Florida. Image courtesy of John Knox Village of Florida, Inc.

Paving the path

The “Best in Wellness” awards shine a light on senior living communities that lead the way in a comprehensive and evolving approach to wellness that enhances the lives of residents and employees. Although the *Journal on Active Aging*® previously announced the names of 2023’s winners (see “Resources” on page 53), they appear here as part of the series highlighting the ICAA NuStep Beacon and Pinnacle Awards’ winning communities.

2023 ICAA NuStep Pinnacle and Beacon Awards winners

1. Asbury Solomons (Solomons, Maryland)
2. Splendido At Rancho Vistoso (Tucson, Arizona)
3. Juniper Village at Chatham (Chatham Township, New Jersey)
4. Bridgewater Retirement Community (Bridgewater, Virginia)
5. John Knox Village of Florida (Pompano Beach, Florida)

2023 ICAA NuStep Beacon Award winners

6. Tapestry at Victoria Harbour (Victoria, British Columbia, Canada)
7. On Top of the World Communities (Ocala, Florida)
8. Asbury Methodist Village (Gaithersburg, Maryland)
9. Carolina Bay at Autumn Hall (Wilmington, North Carolina)
10. Maravilla Santa Barbara (Santa Barbara, California)
11. Maravilla Scottsdale (Scottsdale, Arizona)
12. GenCare Lifestyle Seattle at Ballard Landmark (Seattle, Washington)
13. Lakeview Village (Lenexa, Kansas)
14. Meadowood Senior Living (Worcester Township, Pennsylvania)

15. Berwick Qualicum Beach (Qualicum Beach, British Columbia, Canada)
16. Friendship Village Sunset Hills (Sunset Hills, Missouri)
17. Asbury Springhill (Erie, Pennsylvania)
18. Moorings Park Grande Lake (Naples, Florida)
19. GenCare Lifestyle Federal Way (Federal Way, Washington)
20. The Moorings of Arlington Heights (Arlington Heights, Illinois)
21. Galloway Ridge at Ferrington (Pittsboro, North Carolina)
22. River Landing at Sandy Ridge (Colfax, North Carolina)
23. Shell Point Retirement Community (Fort Myers, Florida)
24. Williamsburg Landing (Williamsburg, Virginia)
25. Covenant Living of Golden Valley (Golden Valley, Minnesota)