

Celebrating Life Every Day

I began to write this column at the approach of the festive season and it crossed my mind that the holidays are a special time in long term care homes. Then, perhaps like many others, I caught myself and reflected on the fact that every day is special in long term care. Special because the unique service that long term care homes provide helps residents to celebrate life.

The scope of this celebration is vast and encompasses everything from individual life experiences and milestones to shared cultures and traditions.

Searching the archive

To get a sense of just how comprehensive this celebration of life is, I decided to browse our Morning Report archive (www.oltca.com). The archive contains stories on OLTCA member home activities dating back to 2003.

As expected, there are stories of homes helping residents to celebrate the holiday season. What is interesting is that these reports aren't always about decorating to create a festive physical atmosphere. They are also about helping residents connect to the values that they associate with the celebration.

This is illustrated by two recent stories. Residents at a member home in Lindsey joined forces with students at a local elementary school to create 48 gift baskets for needy families. Another member home in Muskoka Landing partnered with a local church group that provided residents with a selection of donated gifts that they could give to their families and friends.

Other stories detail the efforts of homes to help residents participate in a wide range of celebrations that are rooted in their own traditions and cultures.

by Gilbert Heffern

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A framework for celebration

While tradition and culture help to create the celebratory framework, this framework is supplemented by a variety of other themes. In many cases, these are determined by the specific interests of individual residents or groups of residents and run throughout the year, not just during the holiday season.

Gardening appears to be one of the more popular interests. Horticultural programs run the gamut from tending plants and flowers to growing vegetable gardens that allow residents to experience the familiar rites of spring plantings and fall fairs and harvests. In the case of the latter, the cycle is not complete until residents have had the opportunity to taste the fruits—or vegetables—of their labour, often in meals created by food-services staff.

Examples of other resident-interest-based celebrations include inviting a local motorcycle club to join in a Father's Day barbeque and using new technologies, such as the Nintendo Wii interactive gaming system, to foster friendly competition both within and between homes.

Within these broader-based celebratory events, homes always find the time to recognize each resident as an individual and

unique person. This includes the celebration of more common milestones such as birthdays and anniversaries, but often goes much deeper.

This past November, Morning Report featured the story of veteran Spencer Duff Checkley, who took part in one home's Remembrance Day services. These types of activities not only recognize the individual, but also provide a means by which residents can share a part of themselves with other residents, families and staff.

Similar benefits derive from such initiatives as inter-generational activities, art programs and woodworking lessons.

The variety and depth of these initiatives provides evidence that long term care celebrates life at both an individual and shared level. This celebration is deeply rooted in—and determined by—resident interests, life experiences, personal histories, traditions and cultures. This focus on fulfillment makes every day in long term care a special one, and makes for a rich tapestry of life that is a tribute to both residents and staff. It deserves more recognition than it often receives and more appreciation from the rest of us than we sometimes think to offer. **LTC**

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