



# ElderCare

## Senior Living Administrators Face 'Culture Change'; Trends in Hospitality

Let's face it, food is at the heart of senior living communities. But for today's older adults, dining is more than just another meal. Gone are the days of food prepared in bulk and served in the traditional "massive" dining room setting. Today's administrators are challenged with a "culture change" to create intimate dining more conducive to socialization, farm fresh food that is prepared to order, wellness programs, and sustainable, greener operations.

Just as no two cultures are exactly alike, "culture change" will be different for each individual community, as defined by the desires and preferences of its residents.

Cura Hospitality realizes the need to have multiple options and resources prepared to address community-specific culture change. To do so, some of the best operators, marketers and clinicians from Cura, as well as senior living administrators who serve in advisory roles, help the industry understand the trends and needs of the new senior. Together, they create action plans to address everything from points of dining service to designing greener communities.

According to Cura President and Founder Mitch Possinger, whose company is a leading specialist in senior living and healthcare food service management, "Our goal is to be a resource for our clients in implementing their culture change initiatives, to help them increase census and be a leader during these tough economic times."

For example, food service at the new Hanna HealthCare Center at Longwood at Oakmont, PA is now "decentralized" to free-standing country kitchens. Instead of tray-line systems, which limit what healthcare residents can order, residents now receive a variety of fresh food that is plated and prepared to order when they are ready to eat at the country kitchens.

This new style of service resembles home-like kitchens and allows for a main and alternate entree to be prepared in the main kitchen and delivered to the country kitchen just prior to serving the residents. Fresh food is held hot in attractive steam tables out of view and surrounded by a large countertop. In addition to the entrees, soups and sandwiches - as well as quick-serve items - such as hot dogs and grilled cheese, are easily prepared to order by request. Residents, with the assistance of recreational services staff, also may use the country kitchen to prepare food.

According to Michael K. Haye, executive director of Longwood at Oakmont, residents also look forward to eating in the country kitchen, because of its openness to living and activity areas, which increases socialization, mobility (as they need to walk to the dining room) and overall well-being.

Older adults also like convenience, especially independent living residents. At Sherwood Oaks in Cranberry Township, PA, residents requested grab-and-go options, so Cura constructed a cart that offered fruit, soups and sandwiches twice a week. The cart concept was so popular, that Sherwood Oaks incorporated a grab-and-go section in their dining room renovations. The grab-and-go section offers a variety of food that is packaged in bio-based green-ware. Open daily, residents may



Sherwood Oaks Cafe and Corner Market

choose from freshly cut fruit, yogurt with granola, desserts, salads made fresh daily, sandwiches on homemade breads and assorted beverages.

A small area for grab-and-go groceries includes: milk, eggs, boxed cereals, deli meats, loaves of bread and other convenience items.

Older adults are also more aware and educated on the key health benefits of the food they eat. In fact, it's important for them to know where their food is grown and harvested. Jamie Moore, Cura's director of sourcing and sustainability, partnered with more than 150 local farms and producers of food that deliver fresh product to our communities through Cura's FarmSource program.

Moore says that sustainability and designing greener communities continues to challenge us to behave ethically across generations — senior living is no exception. In fact seniors are as active as ever concerning these issues.

For example, The Bridges at Bent Creek in Mechanicsburg, PA, plans to begin its own version of FarmSource. Residents will attend a class instructed by a local greenhouse owner who will give the residents the "know-how" to plant, water, tend and care for their own garden. The "harvest" from the garden will be used by Cura's executive chef to prepare foods and will be identified with a customized logo when the foods are featured on the menu.

Future plans may include the purchase of a composter so that the community's pre-consumer food waste consisting of vegetable waste and woody material (cardboard, leaves and woodchips) can be composted on-site and returned back to the garden.

Cura's clinicians also conduct wellness workshops that tackle the specific health issues that affect the lives of older adults. Topics may include eating for a healthy life, trans-fatty acids and heart disease, exercise and nutrition, diet trends and fads, organic foods and living with diseases. According to Joe Herman, Cura's senior director of clinical and nutrition services, M.S., R.D., L.D.N., our dietitians create customized nutrition plans and menus, as well as orga-

nize wellness events that provide residents the opportunity to utilize our health experts and take part in health screenings.

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