

# A Strong Wellness Program Is Much More Than a Nice Fitness Center



**Rob Love, President/CEO, Love & Company**

Over the past 20 years, fitness centers in Life Plan Communities have undergone a major transformation, adding state-of-the-art equipment in large rooms with lots of natural light and enhancing personal training programs. But to truly meet the wellness needs and expectations of today's and tomorrow's prospective residents, community wellness programs need to go well beyond offering strong fitness programs. And that is exactly what is happening at John Knox Village in Pompano Beach, Florida, and Meadowood in Lansdale, Pennsylvania, where both communities received the 2022 ICAA (International Council on Active Aging) NuStep Pinnacle Award as one of the top five senior living communities for wellness in North America.

## Wellness Is More Than a Department

"At Meadowood," said Regina Farrell, vice president of health services, "wellness is not a department. It's something that is at the core of the community."

Becky Anhorn, Meadowood's director of fitness and wellness, described the community's approach. "We meet individually with each new resident. We do an assessment to determine what their goals are, and where they see their needs in the next year. Then we work to develop a whole-body program that meets them where they are, with the abilities they have. Each person's program is unique to them.

And once that program is developed, our job is to be the concierge that helps them connect with the departments in the community that can provide the support they need along the way."

At Meadowood, this includes providing emotional support and nutrition education, evaluating residents' physical environment and tapping into their vocational skills, as well as offering fitness support. Each year the community reassesses each of the seven areas of wellness and revises residents' plans for the coming year.

John Knox Village incorporates a similar philosophy. "Our life plan counselors do a great job of discovery during the sales process," said Jamison Becker, the director of marketing innovation, who oversees the community's life enrichment program. "Information on each new resident's interests is sent out to all departments."

"We then do individual evaluations of each new resident," said Marsha Dixon, fitness and aquatics lifestyle manager for John Knox Village. "It's research-based and lets them know where they are physically and how we can keep them living independently, because that's their number one goal. For one resident, maybe their goal is just to be able to walk up stairs on their own. For another, maybe they want to play pickleball, so we ensure they have the strength and stamina to do that. We look at their balance, upper and lower body strength, and endurance, then put together an exercise prescription based on what we learned."

As with Meadowood, John Knox Village's program goes far beyond fitness. Rachael Gallagher, Spiritual Life director, shared that "One of the things I like to say is, 'Even if you think you're not spiritual, we all have a spirit, and it needs to be cared for.' That is what Spiritual Life does here. It's going to be totally different for every resident, but all under the guise of what gives you meaning in life, and what makes you feel like you're fulfilling your purpose."





Meadowood resident-staff water volleyball competition

## Wellness Extends Beyond Independent Living

Another commonality of the Meadowood and John Knox Village programs is that they are not limited to independent living residents. Both communities extend their offerings into higher levels of care and to employees.

“One of our staff members keeps telling us she is ‘working in the land of unicorns,’” says Ms. Farrell. “She can’t believe we offer the same assessments and coaching to team members that we do for residents. Extending Meadowell to employees has definitely helped our employee retention. We installed a basketball hoop in our wellness garden to enable team members to destress during lunch breaks, and a team of employees is training together to compete in a Tough Mudder event.”

In Meadowood’s McLean Memory Care program, the wellness program includes sports and spiritual experience stations along an infinity loop, a garden residents can work in, another garden in which they can enjoy a peaceful environment, and an equine therapy program where residents visit a local farm and can both ride and groom the horses. “It’s amazing to see someone with significant memory impairment just come alive when they are with a horse,” said Ms. Farrell. “And all of this is research-based,” she added. “There is a lot of research with people in memory care that shows that doing things from their childhood creates a better memory capacity.”



## MEADOWELL PATH TO WELLNESS

*Meadowood recently branded its wellness program as “Meadowell,” and developed this logo.*

Both communities’ programs share a continual focus on evolving and improving. John Knox Village conducts an annual, off-campus retreat of all department managers to explore how they can further integrate offerings between departments. It then holds monthly manager meetings to evaluate how the programs are doing.

## Tracking Engagement and Results

A challenge of all wellness programs is to be able to effectively track and measure engagement. While the hope is that programs will soon be available to automate more of this, today, much of Meadowood’s and John Knox Village’s tracking requires a lot of hands-on compilation. “We track everything for residents and staff,” said Meadowood’s Ms. Farrell.

