

Dining Well

Your dining program is an integral part of your wellness plan. »BY GRACE ZARNAS-HOYER



Today, facilities that implement wellness programs know the concept must go beyond simply offering low-calorie meal options and starting an exercise club. Wellness must focus on six areas: social, vocational, emotional, intellectual, physical and spiritual—and the dining program is a great place to start.

COOKING CLASSES

Phoebe Richland Healthcare Center in Richlandtown, Pa., offers cooking classes to help socialize residents by preparing food items



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that are familiar to them, says Eileen Goos, CDM, CFPP, director of dining services for Cura Hospitality. Recently, Goos and the residents prepared more than 400 acorn squash stuffed pierogies and shared them with the community.

“Residents who seldom interacted came to life, even giving me instruction on how to prepare this local dish. The simple task of preparing the pierogies created a cultural link to their past,” she says.

Picking Manor, Newtown, Pa., also offers cooking classes, “to teach skills the residents can take back and use to prepare healthy meals in their apartments,” says Katie Stauter, CDM, CFPP, director of dining services, Cura Hospitality.

Residents can prepare food to celebrate holidays, religious celebrations or to support community initiatives.

GARDENING PROGRAMS

For many people who lived in farming communities or simply enjoyed gardening, helping grow a facility’s produce touches on vocational, emotional and even physical wellness. At the Bridges at Bent Creek, Mechanicsburg, Pa., the heart of Pennsylvania farming country, residents grow their own vegetables, which are then incorporated into the daily menu.

“I was raised on a dairy farm in Altoona, Pa., where I also farmed corn, wheat and hay. I’ve had a garden ever since,” shares former resident Stanley Bingham.

HEALTHY CHOICES

Of course, those low-calorie meals may be part of a wellness program for some residents, too, but that doesn’t mean they have to be tasteless. Entice residents’ senses with foods that are as delicious as they are healthy, and be sure to pay attention to presentation.

Throughout our lives, we share our most important moments over meals. Whether it’s gathering with friends, celebrating holidays with family, or treating ourselves to something delicious just because, honor your residents by honoring the incredible importance of good food. ■

Grace Zarnas-Hoyer is public relations manager, Cura Hospitality, Orefield, Pa.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Atria Senior Living, with facilities across the country, provides independent, assisted and supportive living for seniors. Its Food for Thought program, where directors hold monthly meetings to gather feedback and menu development ideas from residents, began as a sounding board for diners who were dissatisfied. Now, Atria directors use this time with residents to engage in educational, two-way dialogue that benefits both residents and culinary staff. The program brings in vendors, hosts demonstrations and features guest speakers.

Residents play an active role in their food experience and have a direct line to the top for feedback and ideas. It’s important to hear from your customers about their desires and tastes if you want to be successful.

—Ronda Watson, vice president of culinary services for Atria Senior Living

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