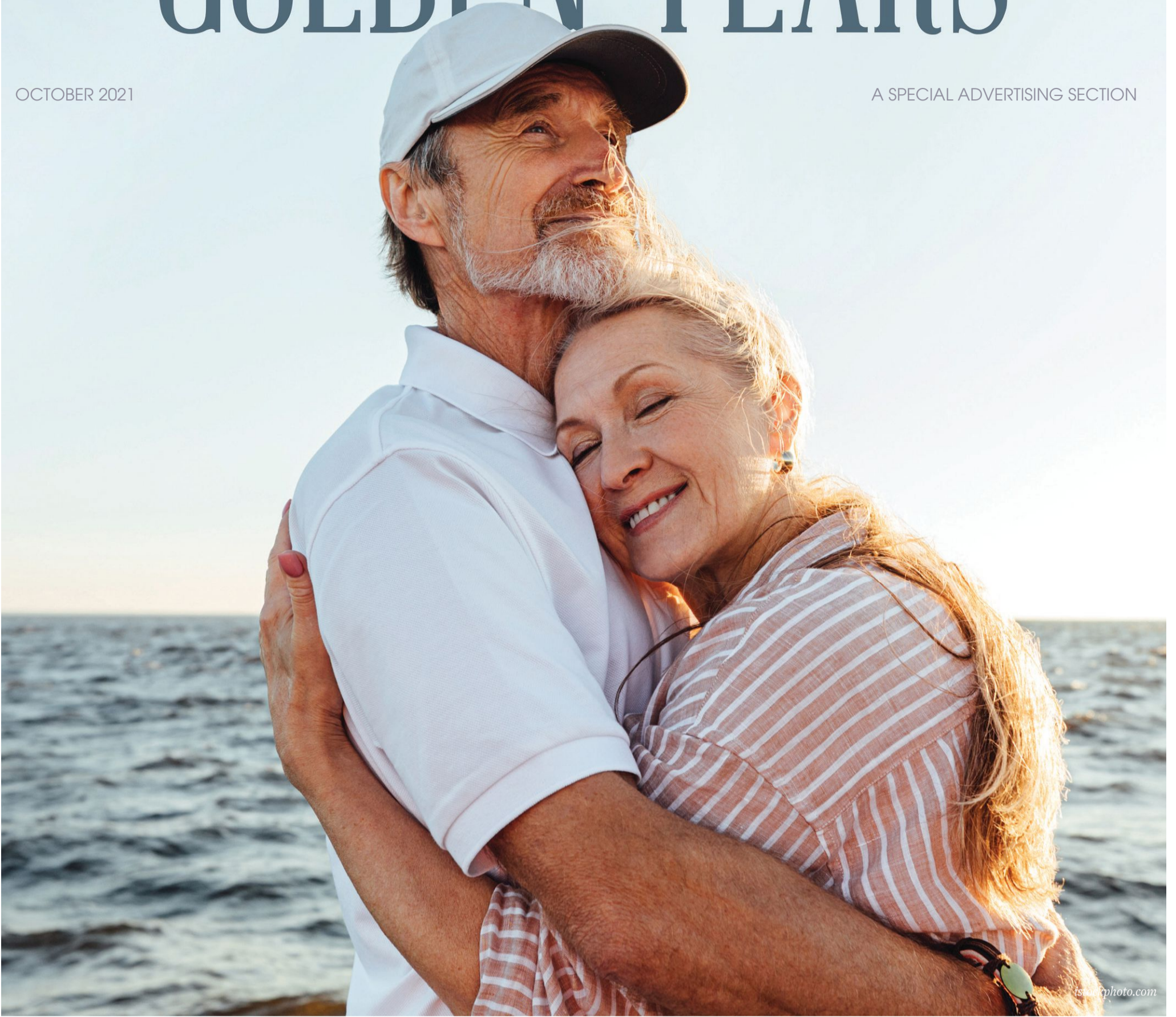


# GOLDEN YEARS

OCTOBER 2021

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## Preparing for Assisted Living

MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICES

BY ALEX FISCHER

Watching your parents age comes with difficult decisions as well as responsibility, and although assisted living may not be the solution for everyone, being better prepared can help mitigate crises in the future.

When a family member takes on the responsibility of care, they oftentimes don't understand how demanding it

can be. In many cases, families don't come to assisted living facilities until care becomes emergent. Because of this, families are continually putting pressure on nursing homes and skilled nursing facilities in a way that takes away from the experience of touring and getting acclimated.

There are a number of tell-tale signs that might indicate

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4



**W**hile moving to a new community can be challenging, moving to a place that instantly feels like home is wonderful. "I love it" is something we hear every day here at The Inn at Waveny, our independent living residence for seniors looking for enhanced, maintenance-free living.

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- Lily, resident at The Inn at Waveny

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# Cutting-Edge Technology

BENEFITTING LIVES OF OLDER CT ADULTS

By Alex Fischer

A dog will be your best friend no matter what. For residents of Duncaster, a life planning community in Bloomfield, robotic pets have successfully acted as stand-in furry friends and have provided companionship to residents in need of a buddy.

Nurse Donna Fogelson piloted the robotic pet program while completing her doctorate and designed it to provide residents with enhanced companionship, which has been met with positive responses from both residents and staff.

Alexandra Mellor, Therapeutic Companion at Duncaster, was recently asked by a resident, “Please

watch my doggie while I go to a program.” When the resident returned, Mellor said the resident joyfully greeted her robotic pet asking how it had behaved in her absence.

Nursing homes across Connecticut have begun to rely on technology in a big way to provide residents with more positive experiences, as well as an active lifestyle in both their communities and society.

Older adults are slowly becoming more comfortable with modern technology, and according to a recent study conducted by Pew Research Center, 73% of those aged 65 and older are now smartphone users.

**73%** OF THOSE AGED 65 AND OLDER ARE NOW SMART PHONE USERS.

In addition to companionship through pets, many Connecticut nursing homes have taken initiative in fostering genuine friendships amongst older folks.

At **Benchmark Senior Living**, CEO Tom Grape created the Something In Common program that is used across all 63 Benchmark communities, including the 17 located in Connecticut. The first program of its kind in the U.S., Something in Common combines artificial intelligence with recorded resident interviews to find residents who share interests or come from similar backgrounds.

“New residents understand how similar their lives are to others who live there and quickly make friends with people who share their careers or backgrounds,” Grape said. “The program has made it easier for our residents to settle in and call our communities home.”

With the onset of the pandemic separating old folks farther from their loved ones than ever before, technology was used in several different ways to keep spirits up in nursing homes statewide.

At **Duncaster: Caleb Hitchcock Health Center**, the staff proactively implements the seven subsectors of ‘smart aging,’ a philosophy that adapts with the everchanging times and technological advancements that can be utilized to strengthen resident experience. The subsectors include telehealth, care coordination, resident monitoring, safety and fall solutions, brain fitness and cognitive care, smart home technologies, workforce solutions as well as communication and engagement.

“For many months technology replaced face-to-face visitations, offering a safe and reliable way for residents to stay connected to loved ones.” Ami De-sai said, Vice President of Health Services at Duncaster. “Campus wide, we saw residents who had been reluctant to embrace new technology learn and enjoy using Skype, ZOOM and FaceTime. And even with visitors coming back into our community the joys of a quick FaceTime call continue.”

Telemedicine services have become an important element to receiving care and have strengthened



general connectivity between residents, their family members and medical providers. By allowing family members to attend physician appointments remotely, this has resulted in a more communicative medical experience all around.

Many nursing homes are now more proactively engaging residents by giving them an opportunity to provide feedback and stay up to date. Duncaster has recently launched an interactive software application, MyDuncaster, where residents can make dining reservations, appointments with the clinic, communicate with other residents, sign up for programs and much more.

At other long-term care facilities, technology has been implemented in different ways to ensure residents that their voices will be heard.

“We are firm believers of using technology here at Covenant Living of Cromwell knowing that it can enhance the lives and experiences of our residents,” Dan Stegbauer said, executive director at the Cromwell community. “And, depending on the type of technology, it provides us with important data to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

# Family caregivers need a break



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Caregiving is hard work. In fact 84% of family caregivers describe it as difficult. The average family caregiver provides over twenty hours of care a week to their loved one. It's no wonder they find themselves neglecting their own needs.

**Signs of caregiver burnout:**

- Stress
- Poor health
- Sleep Problems
- Weight change
- Emotional Outbursts
- Social Isolation



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**Assisted Living** CONTINUED FROM COVER

"THIS PLACE IS  
**perfect**  
AND THEY TOUCH MY HEART!"  
*Lily, resident at The Inn at Waveny.*  
*Photo by Spot On Marketing Partners*

your elder parent may be ready for a level of care that you are not able to give. Declining health condition and inability to care for oneself are certainly concerning, and moving a parent into a community may take the pressure off of managing a chronic health condition and create a higher quality of life for all parties involved.

"Culture and community are so important for creating a warm welcoming feeling when you enter a community," Maplewood Senior Living's Elizabeth O'Dwyer said, Senior Memory Care Director and Certified Dementia Practitioner. "Our interiors have vibrant engaging spaces that have been beautifully designed to make our residents feel at home."

The social aspect of community living has become more important now than ever, the pandemic showing that interaction with others is a central element of the human existence. Maplewood Senior Living specializes in luxury senior living communities, each of which creates a sense of comfort and community. Maplewood offers assisted living, independent living and two distinct levels of memory care support.

"Our staff are the ultimate heart and soul of the Maplewood experience. Every member of our team – from nurses, to chefs, to drivers sets out to better the lives of our residents and ensure they feel seen, appreciated, and loved," O'Dwyer said.

At RiverWoods Durham, another assisted living facility in New England, the memory support community is designed in a "small household" model that creates an intimate and comfortable experience for residents, something that is showcased whenever prospective residents come in for a tour.

"It's really about the visiting prospect and their family members seeing the community connections that RiverWoods has created through their person-centered approach," Kellie Fiers said, Senior Living Counselor at RiverWoods Durham. "Relationships, socialization, growth, sense of purpose and continued learning should be a part of our lives at every age."

At Waveny LifeCare Network, a New Canaan nonprofit organization, their full continuum of care includes inde-



pendent living, memory care, skilled nursing, outpatient rehab, home care, hospice and so much more. The staff goes the extra mile for every resident, so aging in place is safe, fun and seamless.

Waveny offers memory care, skilled nursing, home care,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

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<p style="margin: 0;"><b>STAMFORD</b> 196 Greynock Place Stamford, CT 06901 Phone: 203-921-4161 Fax: 203-921-4169</p>	<p style="margin: 0;"><b>BRIDGEPORT</b> 4200 Park Avenue Bridgeport, CT 06604 Phone: 203-659-3601</p>		

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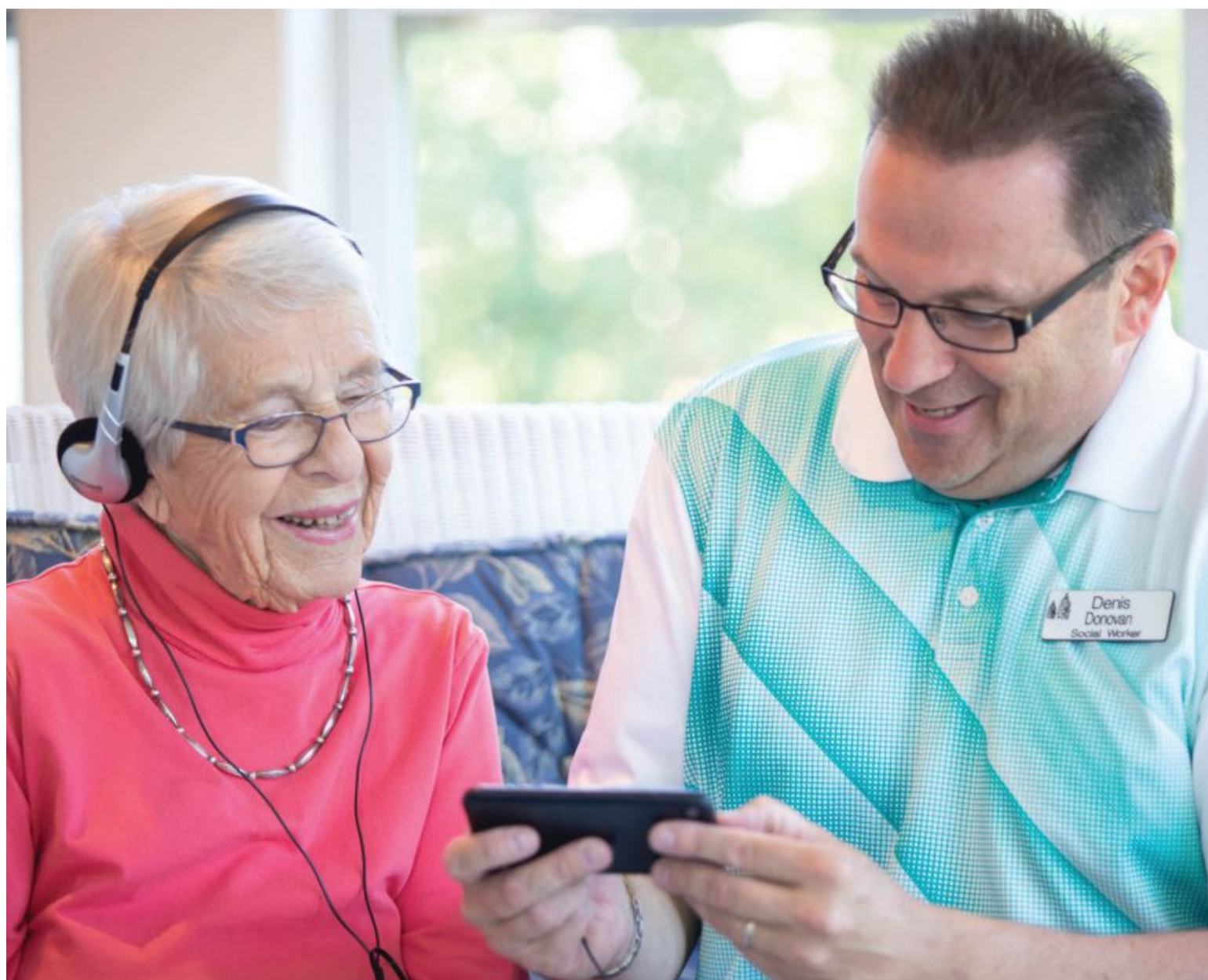
MEET BELLA

Bella is our community pet who is solely dedicated to lifting the spirits of our wonderful residents.



## Technology CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

RiverWoods staff members are dedicated to forming meaningful relationships with residents and helping out however they can. Photo by the RiverWoods Group



create efficiencies in operations and improving how we provide service to the residents and their families.”

At **Covenant Living of Cromwell**, a centrally located, faith-based, not-for-profit continuing care retirement community, Censuble is now in effect, a feedback technology that allows the staff to get feedback from residents

using kiosks. Additionally, an in-house TV channel runs every day to communicate to residents and inform them about happenings in their community.

“During the height of the pandemic we really relied on our in-house broadcast channels to help keep residents engaged through a variety of programming,” Life Services Director Heather

Knochel said. “Without that technology in place, it would have been extremely difficult to keep everyone informed and connected as much as we did.”

One of the most burdensome struggles of aging is hearing loss, something that has proven to be consistent in Connecticut nursing homes. At popu-



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lar New England continuing care retirement community, **RiverWoods**, special dining room hearing loop tables featured in all three of their communities reduce ambient noise and enhance voices for conversation to flow more effectively.

“This is critical as it maintains residents’ dignity, allowing residents with hearing impairments to have the same wonderful dining experience as a resident that does not have such an impairment,” Tracy Jeffers, Community Life Director at RiverWoods Exeter said.

This creation brought RiverWoods’ 2018 win of the Innovation of the Year Award by LeadingAge Maine and New Hampshire.

Covenant Living of Cromwell has launched their Eversound system, another hearing-oriented technological tool, using wireless headsets to eliminate white noise and other distractions. The general findings from implementing the technology were higher participation rates in community programs across the board.

For many older adults, reminiscing on the past is a great way to remind themselves of the best times in their lives. Many nursing homes and continuing care facilities have tapped into memory care to provide happiness in a unique way.

The RiverWoods Group’s IN2L program allows residents to stay connected to all that they accomplished in their lives, including their friends, family, interests and hobbies. IN2L, which stands for “It’s Never Too Late,

allows residents their own personalized tab where they have access to Skype and their own personal email addresses.

“It facilitates our person-centered approach to reaching someone and bringing them joy in a new way,” RiverWoods Memory Support Manager Meghan Wentworth said.

Through programs like Virtusense, occupational therapists can analyze risks and likelihood that a resident will have a fall in the next year. At **Masonicare Senior Living Community**, the staff has implemented Virtusense to prevent more accidents and injuries to residents at all their CT locations.

“Technological advancements that predict even the slightest change in condition help us proactively treat the condition before it becomes problematic,” Masonicare Vice President of Strategy Ann Collette said.

Technological advances have revolutionized what it means to spend your life in an assisted living facility, and more innovation will result in an even more efficient and pleasant experience.

“Technology will never replace good clinical skills and practice, but it is a valuable tool that is helping our organization stay ahead of the curve and on top of our resident’s health and well-being,” Collette said.

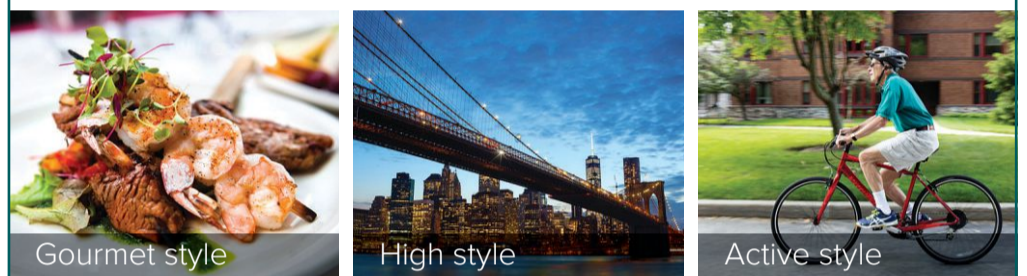
For more information be sure to visit the communities’ websites.

*The above story originally ran in the August 2021 issue of Connecticut Magazine in the Senior Living special advertising section*

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## Assisted Living CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

outpatient care, independent living support and so much more, all of which comes with staff that goes the extra mile for every resident.

“We can meet virtually all the needs of seniors,” Chief Sales and Marketing Officer Terry Henry said. “Our compassion and care is really just an outgrowth of our mission as a nonprofit to serve the community in whatever way we need to. In doing so, we provide a higher level of care.”

If your elder parent has voiced feelings of being lonely and isolated or

their tastes and lifestyle preferences, though they may differ from yours.”

When touring assisted living facilities, it is crucial to understand what daily life looks like and if your loved one’s needs can be met in a way that suits them.

“Socialization is at the core of assisted living communities. Planned activities, social dining areas, and one-on-one interaction are everyday occurrences in our communities,” O’Dwyer said.

The planning stage is one that

IT’S OFTEN BEST TO START WITH  
A CANDID DISCUSSION WITH YOUR

# loved one.

has lost interest in activities or hobbies they used to love, this could be another reason to consider assisted living. Not only is the social aspect of old age important, but the planning stage is key in making sure you have chosen the right place for your loved one to carry on with life for as long as they are able.

“It’s often best to start with a candid discussion with your loved one. Share your concerns, re-affirm you care deeply for them and are committed to being finding their best option,” Henry said. “Since your loved one will be the community’s resident, it’s important to honor

should not be overlooked, and in many cases can save families from dangerous situations in which the need for care becomes immediate. Choosing the correct assisted living facility for your loved one should be a positive experience, ensuring them that age is just a number and that there many more special moments to look forward to in the next steps of their lives.

For more information about any of the above assisted living communities, visit [waveny.org](http://waveny.org), [riverwoodsgroup.org](http://riverwoodsgroup.org), [maplewoodseniorliving.com](http://maplewoodseniorliving.com).

## GOLDEN YEARS

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# Caregivers

CONTINUE TO RUN LOW IN CT

By Alex Fischer

The caregiver shortage has spread itself both far and wide across the state of Connecticut, presenting as a problem for families and nursing homes alike who have struggled for support.

The demand for caregivers has changed since the pandemic, and in many ways only exacerbated the problem as more people desire at-home personal aides for their loved ones rather than turning to long-term care facilities and nursing homes. When this need can't be met, and in many instances, there just aren't enough trained caregivers, the responsibility falls on family and friends who are given no choice but to take the care of their loved one into their own hands.

With people living longer than ever before, there is a far bigger need for care as well as a need for people to provide it. Nursing homes across the state have been forced to tread water with the staff they have been able to retain, accounting for gaps in operations and losing the opportunities for individual upward mobility.

When asked if the caregiver shortage is apparent in Connecticut, Ron Bucci, senior executive director at the **Greens at Cannondale** in Wilton, replied "Absolutely, yes."

Burnout and turnover are issues across the board for those in this industry as well as those who are not trained caregivers but are responsible for a

## PEACE OF MIND



"My mother started to show changes in her memory about seven years ago and was diagnosed with Alzheimer's three years ago. For many years she was still able to function on her own. But then she started doing things that made me very concerned. She became reckless with her finances, began giving away possessions, wasn't eating properly, and would wander off. It became clear that things needed to change. My mother had traveled quite a bit and stayed in many hotels so my hope was to find a community that looked and felt like a hotel to help make the transition easier. Maplewood was the perfect solution as it was minutes from my house, had beautiful interiors, and most importantly her cat Gracie was able to join her. The team suggested she move to Currents, which I admit was initially hard for me to come to terms with, but in a short time, things improved significantly. Her whole demeanor changed. With the team helping her to manage her medication and providing the attention she needs, she is calmer, more content and once again, she was happy."

— *Rebecca & Deborah*, Daughter and Resident

Maplewood Senior Living is dedicated to the care and well-being of our residents living with Alzheimer's disease and dementia. We offer two distinctive levels of memory care that address the unique needs of our residents. Currents™ at Maplewood Senior Living was created for residents with moderate to advanced-stage memory impairment. It provides additional support and personalized services.

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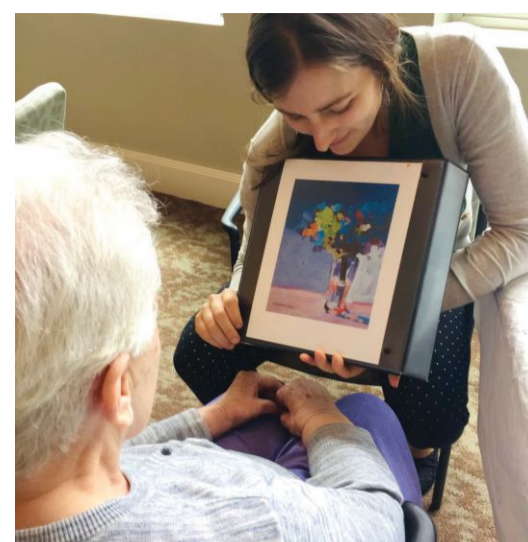
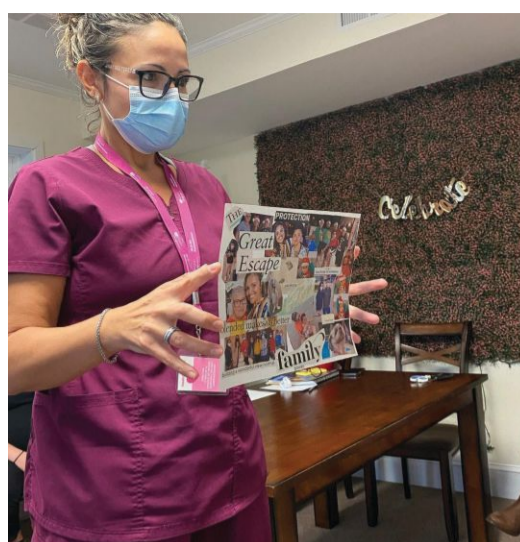
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Photos left to right: Residents at Greens at Cannondale playing a game, photo by Kelley Addison. An employee at Sheraton Caregivers shows her appreciation for residents, photo by G. Isaacs. A caregiver and resident experience art together, photo by S. Slater.

loved one anyways. Workers in nursing homes have become accustomed to a constantly changing set of duties, picking up slack in areas they may not have originally been trained for. With this lack of structure along with what is likely, for many caregivers, a low wage, this has translated into a shortage across the board.

“We all get to know each other and if there’s a lot of turnover quality plummets, because the family and the resident kind of have to start all over again for us getting to know them, what they like to eat, when they get up, they are important things to them, so the relationships matter,” Bucci said. “When we get to know all this stuff, that’s the good stuff. They feel comfortable that we know each other and that we can do a better job.”

The threat of COVID steepened the already falling number of caregivers in the state,

only reemphasizing the importance of advocacy as a core value in this industry.

“With COVID, it took whatever that load was and quadrupled it,” CEO of **Sheraton Caregivers** Gillian Isaacs said.

Isaacs said that several of her employees expressed concerns over safety and dabbled with the fact that staying home might be more favorable, especially if a steady flow of income was guaranteed.

“We didn’t have a lot of quantity, so we were also dealing with the quality, people were totally burnt out, they were all exhausted,” Isaacs said. “We increased and elevated our compensation, we were paying premium for COVID cases or for going into high COVID number communities, but that still wasn’t enough. If people were going to be getting their guaranteed unemployment check, they would rather stay

at home.”

The workload is only increasing as the shortage intensifies, and both Isaacs and Bucci feel as if advocating for higher wages could be the only solution to attract new hires into the assisted living space.

“Caregivers should be compensated more generously — they should be appreciated, honored, mentored, appreciated and given chances to grow. We give people chances to advance, we pay them more than our competitors, we give them a rich benefit package, and we give them generous time off so that they can rest and have time with their families,” Bucci said “I think if our industry globally can do more of that, I think more folks might choose to enter senior care or health care as an option.”

Bucci and the staff at the **Greens at Cannondale** have fostered a welcoming environment for residents and

employees alike. The community has stuck together throughout the entire pandemic and is now 100% vaccinated.

“We made it convenient for people to get their shot, we had some fun with it, we had a selfie station and lots of Rosie the Riveter pins, and raffles and bonuses,” Bucci said of his success in vaccinating the community. “We implemented the policy with lots of dialogue and concern and empathy for our caregivers and we did it internally our way.”

Caregivers in Connecticut are cared for even amidst the depths of the shortage. The assisted living industry is always looking to hire more nurses and nurses’ aides and are hopeful to reduce the heavy load the shortage has brought on in years to come.

For more information visit [thegreensatcannondale.com](http://thegreensatcannondale.com) or [sheraton.care](http://sheraton.care).

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