



ST. LEONARD

A FRANCISCAN LIVING COMMUNITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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St. Leonard First In Nation To Receive Progressive Wellness Certification

Centerville community transforms culture, becomes model for concept poised to go international

Centerville, OH (August 3, 2011) – The residents and employees at St. Leonard Franciscan Living Community know that the most effective change comes one step at a time.

More than a year ago, the Centerville community was one of three organizations across the nation chosen to pilot a progressive wellness program developed by Atlanta-based Vital Nation. Today it has become the only one of those selected to successfully meet the rigorous criteria to be officially certified in the program, called Vital Life. The achievement is a coup for this local continuing care retirement community (CCRC), and makes it an international model to other communities wanting to do the same.

Vital Life was created by businessman Bill Witte to tackle ever-increasing issues facing aging Americans – most notably, rising health care costs – by helping individuals regain control over their health. Vital Life helps communities transform their culture so that wellness is a way of life, not a mandate that eventually seems too difficult to achieve.

It's a change that's expected to happen over years, eventually leading to a decrease in a community's morbidity and frailty– and resulting in, lower health care costs, and an increase in resident and employee satisfaction. Most importantly, Vital Life is one the first programs in the nation to provide a best practice blueprint for wellness in senior living communities.

“Most CCRCs have accreditation agencies for their best of practices in nursing and medical functions, but we have never had a concrete standard by which to be graded and rewarded when it comes to holistic wellness,” said Debra Stewart, director of wellness at St. Leonard. “Vital Life provides that and we are so proud to say we are the first to receive it.”

In the past 12 months, St. Leonard residents and employees, as well as outside community members, created teams that addressed the eight key areas of health including the nutritional, environmental, spiritual, physical, vocational, intellectual and emotional.

Groups created their own unique way of addressing each of the eight areas of wellness. St. Leonard also provided campus-wide events and guidance. Walking programs, for instance, were designed in which people counted their miles to a certain destination. More than 390 people walked a combined 183,000 miles to Disneyland. For some, those steps were taken outdoors around the campus, and for others it was a milestone to get them done right beside their beds. Many are now starting their journey to Assisi, Italy.

Unlike most wellness programs that focus on one particular aspect such as nutrition, Vital Life equips communities with tools and education to address health in a holistic way. The program was widely received with nearly half of its 760 residents and 70 percent of its 350 employees participating. Its impact also spread beyond the campus boundaries by including more than 200 members from the greater Miami Valley region.

“It has been a miracle to watch it happen,” Stewart said. “Many wellness programs have started and stopped because people find it difficult to accept drastic change. But this is different. This is motivating, vitalizing and inspiring.”

Research has shown that it will take several years before a change in morbidity and frailty can be recorded. Still, St. Leonard is definitely on a path to transform what senior living looks like. Residents are changing their daily routines to include Zumba classes and shocking families at holiday gatherings by showing up without medical aids like back braces. To Vital Life Founder Witte, those stories are just a foreshadowing of something greater.

“We know that 50 to 90 percent of maladies and illnesses can be prevented simply by changing lifestyle,” Witte said.

Witte will use St. Leonard as a model for other communities wanting to do the same, one of which is international. Meanwhile, the retirement community will celebrate its certification at 10 a.m. September 21st at the newly opened Franciscan Center.

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St. Leonard is one of the largest Catholic sponsored retirement communities in the United States located on 240 acres of countryside in Centerville, Ohio, just 10 miles south of Dayton. The community's unique array of distinctive, yet interrelated, mature living programs are designed to meet the individual needs of the 760 seniors living there. Sponsored by the Sisters of St. Francis, St. Leonard provides a secure and friendly atmosphere where reverence, service and stewardship are its foundation. They are the third largest employer in the city of Centerville.