



A torch relay opens the monthlong Presbyterian Senior Living Olympics in October 2021. Photo: Amanda Mylin

Thriving at PSL:

A resident-led special event celebrates wellness

In 2021, Presbyterian Senior Living residents collaborated with team members to coordinate and plan a wellness challenge inspired by Active Aging Week®. In addition to benefits for participants, the monthlong initiative ratcheted up resident support for PSL's new wellness approach

Summer 2020 challenged providers of senior living, care and aging services with pandemic concerns. While the health and



safety of residents and staff were consuming issues, so too were questions of how to support their overall wellness. At Presbyterian Senior Living (PSL) in Dillsburg, Pennsylvania, plans for an in-house wellness initiative moved ahead, with resident focus groups providing input as the not-for-profit developed its wellness culture. Fostering this culture is Thrive Wellness, PSL's "resident-driven approach to wellness."¹

Launched early in 2021, Thrive Wellness "promotes a culture of wellness, engagement and purposeful living to empower

all individuals to live their best lives,"¹ according to the PSL website. Key to this approach is collaboration between residents and team members and between the organization's communities. Together with its affiliates, PSL serves 6,000+ older adults in 30 locations in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware and Ohio.

The Thrive Wellness Steering Group demonstrates that collaborative spirit, with independent-living residents, team members and community leadership all involved. (A second steering group including

residents from personal care, assisted living and skilled nursing has developed Thrive Wellness for these levels of living after focus groups to hear from these residents last summer. A launch is expected in the first quarter of 2022.²)

In keeping with the resident-driven philosophy and the collaborative, holistic framework of Thrive Wellness,¹ the steering group came up with an idea for a special event inspired by Active Aging Week[®], the

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annual ICAA-led campaign to promote active, engaged living, presented by Humana. The PSL initiative would have its own twists, however.

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Celebrating active aging all month long

“In late spring, resident members of the steering group recommended a fun, future event for PSL communities to engage in, celebrating Thrive Wellness,” says Jim Mangol, the organization’s corporate director of Thrive Wellness. “Their idea was to have the first-ever Presbyterian Senior Living Olympics in fall 2021.”²

At the Thrive Wellness quarterly forum held in July via Zoom, 30+ residents from 10 PSL life-plan communities discussed the steering group’s suggestion with team members, also floating ideas for possible events and challenges, according to Mangol. Decisions included:²

- holding a monthlong Olympics in October
- hosting competitive and noncompetitive events in each community
- featuring one event or challenge per Thrive Wellness dimension

All residents who took part then received a survey, as did the steering group and team members in each PSL community. In August, community life directors and fitness directors at each community met with the steering group to talk about what the survey revealed, and which event ideas had garnered the most support. They focused

on how these events might take place in each community, plus which “would be competitive across all communities.”²

Mangol adds that resident-led Thrive Wellness Community Committees in each location met monthly with PSL team members, collaborating closely as they prepared for the festivities.

Ring in the Olympics

Once October arrived, the PSL Olympics kicked off in the organization’s life-plan communities in Pennsylvania, Maryland and Delaware. The goal was “to provide fellowship and friendly competition across communities,” says Mangol. Six events took place throughout the month in each community, with nearly 1,800 independent-living residents believed to have participated. These events included:²

Competitive

- “Move-a-Thon” (physical)
- Nature Scavenger Hunt (spiritual)
- Art/Photography Gallery Contest (emotional)

Noncompetitive

- Trivia (intellectual)
- Social Mixer (social)
- Collecting Socks for the Homeless (vocational)

“I had the privilege of being a coordinator,” mentions Barb Herrera, a Westminster Woods at Huntingdon (Pennsylvania) resident and Thrive Wellness committee member. “I have a lot more appreciation for our activities director. We have a large Thrive Wellness Community Committee—17 people. It took all of us,” Herrera states. “I formed subcommittees; empowered them to make the events their own. Initially, they looked to me for direction,” she says, “but ‘No, my Teammates, spread your wings and fly.’ And they did!”

Among the outcomes from the PSL Olympics, residents in the life-plan communities logged 9,150 hours of movement in October, Mangol notes—equivalent to

36,598 miles, or traveling across the United States from PSL’s Pennsylvania head office to San Francisco six times.³

Results were equally notable when it came to the “Collecting Socks for the Homeless” event. Residents in the 10 PSL communities donated 3,424 new pairs of socks, which are highly requested items for shelters. But the donations didn’t stop there. Residents provided six SUV loads of clothing for Afghan refugees and several loads for domestic abuse shelters, including such vital supplies as diapers, clothing for babies and children, and personal care items. In total, 25 organizations in Pennsylvania, Maryland and Delaware benefitted from donations made as part of the first PSL Olympics.³

Engaging experiences

Given the success of the 2021 PSL Olympics and the impending launch of Thrive Wellness in personal care, assisted living and skilled nursing, the 2022 event will expand. Not only will the initiative include residents in other levels of living, but participation will likely be open to residents of the organization’s affordable communities as well.

Planning the PSL Olympics is exciting, as Barb Herrera discovered. “It was a glorious example of sensitivity and cooperation,” she says. “We turned an anticipated

Resources

Presbyterian Senior Living
www.presbyterianseniorliving.org

Presbyterian Senior Living: Thrive Wellness
www.presbyterianseniorliving.org/about-us/thrive-wellness

Presbyterian Senior Living: Thrive Wellness Blog
www.presbyterianseniorliving.org/blog/topic/thrive-wellness

weeklong event into a monthlong one to accommodate individual community agendas and chose to include noncompetitive events.” While some events engendered less enthusiasm than others, “it was a delight to watch the support the challenge built for Thrive Wellness itself,” Herrera reveals. “Everywhere, people were talking about it—calling each other to verify answers to the scavenger hunt, checking with each other so we didn’t duplicate donations to the shelter. Winning wasn’t the goal—cooperation for success was.” She adds, “For the month of October, we were suddenly more alive.”

For Jim Mangol, who supports the Thrive Wellness initiative across PSL’s locations, the benefits of last year’s resident-led event are clear. “For residents, the inaugural fall Thrive Olympic Challenge provided not just an opportunity to engage with others in friendly competition,” he says, “but it also brought residents closer together, collaborating in friendship and giving, and contributing to a much greater common purpose: to help other people in need in the greater community.”³

References

1. Presbyterian Senior Living. (n.d.). What is Thrive Wellness? Retrieved from <https://www.presbyterianseniorliving.org/about-us/thrive-wellness>.
2. Mangol, J. (2021, August 26). Thrive Wellness: October PSL Olympics & Future Programming for All Levels of Living. *Thrive Wellness Blog*. Presbyterian Senior Living. Retrieved from <https://www.presbyterianseniorliving.org/blog/thrive-wellness-october-psl-olympics-future-programming-for-all-levels-of-living>.
3. Mangol, J. (2021, November 24). Thrive Wellness: PSL Residents Embrace the Season of Giving Through Thrive Olympic Challenge. *Thrive Wellness Blog*. Presbyterian Senior Living. Retrieved from <https://www.presbyterianseniorliving.org/blog/thrive-wellness-psl-residents-embrace-the-season-of-giving-through-thrive-olympic-challenge>.

Images courtesy of Presbyterian Senior Living

For the PSL Olympics’ vocational wellness event, residents on 10 campuses donated socks, clothing and other supplies to organizations in Pennsylvania, Maryland and Delaware

