



Students, faculty create win-win situation with Life Care Retirement Community at the Village at Penn State

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University Park, Pa. -- State College resident Maddy Cattell wants her retirement to be anything but "retiring." Penn State senior Megan Moore wants to go to graduate school to pursue her goal of becoming a physician's assistant. The Life Care Retirement Community at the Village at Penn State is helping both of them reach their dreams.

Since its opening in 2003, the Village has worked with the University to create connections between its residents and Penn State's faculty and students through programs that serve the needs of both. For example, students like Moore teach in-house exercise classes for Village residents like Cattell.

"It was great to have this opportunity so early in my college career," said Moore, a double major in kinesiology and integrative arts with a minor in dance, who began her volunteer work at the Village in her freshman year.

"Because of the wonderful experience I had at the Village, I also chose to do my kinesiology internships there. I still volunteer when needed."

For Cattell, living in a retirement community located less than a mile from a world-class university gives her the opportunity to take part in an abundance of interesting activities and make new friends. "The students are just wonderful, each and every one of them," she declared. "By the time they leave at the end of the semester, we feel like family."

A nonprofit continuing-care retirement community, the Life Care Retirement Community at the Village at Penn State is often mistaken for the similarly named Village at Penn State, a for-profit planned residential development, according to Jill Lillie, marketing director at the retirement community. Lillie explained that though the two occupy property next to each other in State College, they are actually separate entities.

"Because of its name, many people think that the Village is owned and operated by the University," she said, "but that's also a misconception." The organization is a nonprofit corporation, governed by a board of directors and is managed by CRSA (Co-operative Retirement Services of America), a Memphis-based company that manages retirement communities nationwide.

However, its affiliation with and proximity to Penn State strengthens the Village's emphasis on physical and mental wellness as one of the components of successful aging, Lillie noted.

"We seek ways to build bridges with the University, and when we succeed, it's a win-win situation for both of us," she said. "The students gain valuable experience, and our residents stay active in body and mind."

Megan Moore's internships and volunteer experiences at the Village grew from her studies with Lori Gravish, a full-time instructor in Penn State's Department of Kinesiology.

Gravish, who is also the Village's wellness coordinator, arranges internships and volunteer work for her students at the Village as part of their coursework. Student interns teach fitness classes, with up to seven structured classes held each day, ranging from tai chi and dance aerobics to stretching and seated yoga. They can also develop specialized classes that reflect their own educational interests -- like Moore, who implemented a pilates class as part of her internship.

The monthly intern lecture series is just another of the many ways that Gravish's students are involved with the residents. The interns give presentations on topics focused on wellness, such as nutrition or recognizing depression. Other projects include student-led golf outings and an annual putting tournament. Each spring the interns participate in planning and running the Village's Wellness Fair, which offers residents free health clinics, screenings, tests, lectures and a complimentary luncheon provided by local vendors. The internships also allow the students to meet final requirements for certification in arthritis care, CPR, and land-and-aquatic exercise.

"It's great experience for the students to interact with people who are older but living independently, and it helps break all the old-age stereotypes," said Gravish. "The students get practical experience with elders in terms of not only the natural aging process, but more importantly the chronic changes that occur with cardiovascular, pulmonary and orthopedic limitations. My goal is to teach students the necessary skills in developing safe, effective and motivational exercise prescriptions for the overall goal of improving functional quality of life."

The connections with Penn State aren't limited to health issues. Penn State's School of Music and the Village recently formed a partnership that has resulted in a series of student music recitals called the "First Friday Series."

"Many of the Village's residents have a keen interest in the arts," said School of Music Dean Susan Haug. "And the performances are great visibility for our music students. Often the residents will come to campus because they enjoyed a particular artist at the Village. It's a perfect example of a mutually beneficial relationship."

The first recital was held this February with string players and a pianist performing for an audience of 50 residents. March's event will feature a soprano/pianist combination. A third is scheduled for April, with more proposed for the fall.

The Village has also paired with the Penn State Press to host local authors as guest lecturers. Last year mushroom expert Bill Russell gave a talk featuring his new book, "A Field Guide to the Wild Mushrooms of Pennsylvania and the Mid-Atlantic."

Another favorite activity at the Village is dining and socializing with student-athletes from the University. Recent dinners with Lady Lions basketball and Penn State women's volleyball teams were especially popular, noted Lillie.

Arrangements are also being made with members of WIST -- Women of Information Sciences and Technology -- in the University's College of Information Sciences and Technology. The organization has offered to teach residents about computers, emailing, software programs and more in half-hour learning sessions.

And through Penn State Continuing Education's "Go-60" program, available to Pennsylvania residents, University alumni and former employees, Villagers who are over 60 and retired or working less than half-time are eligible to take continuing education classes at no charge, on a space-available basis.

Lillie said the Village is hoping to create more of these kinds of partnerships with Penn State students and faculty, and welcomes ideas from the University community. Said Gravish, the Village's wellness coordinator, "There are no limits on what we might try. If a resident or a professor has an idea, we'll try to work it out if we can. We like to say that we're like a big cruise ship -- there is always something to do at the Village."

Visit <http://www.villageatpennstate.com> to learn more about the Life Care Retirement Community at the Village at Penn State.

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