

A close-up photograph of a tropical drink in a glass. The drink is a light-colored, frothy beverage, possibly a smoothie or a milkshake. It is garnished with a slice of pineapple on the rim and a small pink paper umbrella on a stick. A white straw is inserted into the drink. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a bar or a tiki bar setting with blue and white elements.

Practical Planning

BY MARY LOU JAY

Creating
Memorable
Events on
a Small
Budget

Alden Naperville Rehab and Health Care Center treats its residents to a week-long tropical "cruise" where residents can enjoy non-alcoholic drinks at a tiki bar.



Events don't have to be large-scale to be memorable. Many residents look forward to regular get-togethers with their peers for games and good conversation.

MEMORABLE EVENTS at your long-term care facility don't always require a big budget. With a little cash and a lot of creativity, you can plan activities guaranteed to please your residents.

Recreating Special Places and Special Times

People living in a nursing home can no longer enjoy the excitement of real travel, so some facilities bring a taste of exotic locales to them instead.

Every summer, residents of Alden Naperville Rehab and Health Care Center embark on a week-long cruise to an island destination. Palm trees, stuffed parrots and blue waves cut from poster board set the theme, and employees wear cruise wear to get into the spirit.

"The first day, when the 'ship leaves Naperville', everyone wears sailor hats. We set up a tiki bar and serve a different non-alcoholic drink of the day, like piña coladas or strawberry daiquiris," says Activity Director Gail Haviland. The week includes hula contests, a flower-making day, a "straw market" rummage sale and a family luau night, complete with roast pig. (Family members pay a nominal fee to defray costs.) "Cruise week isn't expensive, except for the first-time purchase of decorations, and we save them carefully from year to year," Haviland says.

Medina Manor mimics the glamour of Las Vegas with its twice-a-year casino days. Residents play blackjack, spin a roulette wheel or play small machines. They sip non-alcoholic wine or

margaritas and win tickets to use at the home's monthly garage sale of donated items.

Sometimes residents "travel" through time. The Alden Naperville facility holds a yearly '50s week. Figures of Elvis and Marilyn Monroe grace the front lobby, and one room is decorated like a malt shop. Staff members wear drive-in style waitress costumes (a one-time expense). Staff and residents participate in bubble-gum-blowing, hula hoop and jitterbug contests. "They're all a lot of fun, but they don't cost anything," Haviland says.

Ray Novak, activities director of ManorCare of Oak Lawn West, hopes to evoke the early days of automobiles with an auto show for his residents.

He's asking owners of classic cars in his area to bring their vehicles to the facility's parking lot for a day. To make the event more festive, Novak is planning to provide music and popcorn for visitors to enjoy. "A lot of our guys love looking at car magazines and at classic cars, and people in this area love getting together and showing off their cars," he says.

Happier Holidays

During ManorCare-Hinsdale's 12 days of Christmas celebrations, the staff members recreated the favorite holiday traditions of several residents. Two women were able to help make their favorite Christmas cookies, assisted by staff and other residents. In honor of one man's traditions, the staff baked waffles, decorated walnuts to hang on the tree and read the Christmas story. "For him, it was just the most extraordinary day of the year, and everyone else was just as happy for him," says Activity Director Kellie Peterson.

Shelbyville Manor celebrates Valentine's Day in a big but inexpensive way. At the beginning of February, residents and staff start voting for a Valentine king, queen, prince and princess. "We buy boutonnieres for the men and long-stemmed roses for the women," says Activity Director Michelle Cloe. The royal court is photographed wearing their crowns and royal robes (made



A resident takes part in "cruise" activities during National Nursing Home Week festivities at Mason City Area Nursing Home Association. Photo by Randy Squires.

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years ago and carefully preserved) and the photo appears in the local paper. All residents join in the celebration with punch and cake.

“The residents’ eyes light up when they’ve been crowned and given roses. We’ve even had a couple cry because they’re so excited,” says Cloe.

Sunny Acres Nursing Home in Petersburg holds a yearly Easter egg hunt for residents’ families and employees’ children, a low-cost event that always attracts a crowd.

Medina Manor Nursing Home holds a dress up day shortly before Christmas. Residents pick their outfits from donated clothing and accessories (like boas and jewelry). “They can be silly or

sexy, whatever they want to be,” says Social Service Director Laura Doise. “We take their pictures against a special backdrop, print them out, and then get frames from the dollar store. Residents give the photos to their families for Christmas.”

Community Ties

Community involvement can make an event especially exciting for residents. Shelbyville Manor invites everyone in town to its twice-a-year soup and sandwich supper. Staff members serve two kinds of soup (made by department heads in roasters borrowed from the local fire department), peanut butter sandwiches and dessert. “It’s

5 Ways to Save

1. Re-use decorations.

Choose activities that require no- or low-cost supplies (e.g., dance contest, hula hooping contest).

3. Buy food and supplies in bulk.

Ask community members or family members to provide entertainment.

5. Ask local churches to sponsor residents’ birthday parties.

not really that expensive, because we buy a lot in bulk,” says Cloe. Volunteers provide the entertainment, which has included karaoke and a country western band.

The supper is advertised in the local paper and has drawn as many as 100 people. Community members like the night out and end up staying and visiting with the residents, who enjoy the attention.

Last year, Shelbyville Manor also held a Spring Fling carnival for the community and residents. “This was a higher-budget event, but not as high as you might think,” says Cloe. A staff member’s husband made many of the games—bean bag and ring tosses, duck pond, fishing, and ski-ball. Ice cream came from the dietary department’s budget, and the popcorn came from the activity department’s own machine. The pig for the “Kiss the Pig” contest was brought in by another employee’s relative. They did rent a moon bounce and a dunk tank.

Shelbyville Manor raised \$1,000 through game and food sales. It donated this money to charity but could have used it to defray expenses (with a lot left over).

Sunny Acres Nursing Home in Petersburg also held a carnival for residents, employees and families. Staff members decorated the facility with flags, balloons and carnival-theme posters. Residents and visitors won prizes playing games (many made by the staff) and enjoyed the entertainment at an ice cream social in the dining room.

Sunny Acres Administrator Lester Robertson says the event was cost-effective because of the number of people who came. “I try to look at how many people benefit from an expense,” he says.

Small but Special

Events don’t have to be large-scale to be memorable. At Alden Naperville Rehab and Health Care Center, people look forward to the regular meetings of the men’s club and the Red Hat Society. (Since the budget couldn’t stretch for red hats for everyone, the leader wears the hat and the other members wear red scarves.) The only expense for

such meetings is the juice and cookies served.

ManorCare of Oak Lawn West also has both men’s and women’s clubs. “We meet once a month, and it’s very important to them. Last week at my men’s club, for example, we were just playing poker and having some guy talk,” says Novak.

Every Friday, Sunny Acres holds a doughnuts-and-coffee hour for residents and volunteers. The turnout is always good, and residents enjoy this opportunity to visit.

Many facilities hold monthly birthday parties hosted by local churches or community groups. The groups usually bring cake or cookies and sometimes presents for the residents being honored. Group members frequently provide entertainment for the afternoon as well.

In fact, nothing beats a good volunteer base when it comes to putting on memorable, low-cost events. “We never have to spend that much on parties for residents because we have so many volunteers who give their time,” says Cloe. ■

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