

# Reaching the peak: NuStep award celebrates excellence in older- adult wellness



*(L to r), Keri York Wilkinson, representing the City of Rogers Adult Wellness Center, and June Smedley, representing University Living, winners of the 2008 NuStep Pinnacle Awards. Images courtesy of the City of Rogers Adult Wellness Center and NuStep, Inc.*

**While they differ in many ways, the winners of the 2008 NuStep Pinnacle Awards share a commitment to exceptional wellness services, programming and environments for older adults**

In November 2005, Ann Arbor, Michigan-based NuStep, Inc., added the phrase “Transforming Lives” to its brand identity to further communicate its brand as a catalyst for active living. NuStep defines active living as “a lifestyle characterized by wellness, spirit and vigor,” and one population in which the organization has helped to promote this lifestyle is older adults.

Besides its age-friendly equipment, NuStep supports physical fitness and wellness for people ages 50 and older through its NuStep Pinnacle Awards, now in their tenth year. This awards program salutes organizations that use creativity and commitment to provide programs, environments and services that address the six dimensions of wellness—physical, emotional, spiritual, social, intellectual, vocational—and promote optimal health in older adults. By highlighting these accomplishments, NuStep aims to draw attention to the importance of actively managing fitness and wellness as we age; and to inspire other organizations to provide high-quality offerings for their members or residents.

Each year industry experts go through the Pinnacle entries and narrow their selection to several finalists. Then they go on-site to select award-winners in two categories:

- **Senior Living Community**—any program that is part of an independent living community, assisted living community, and/or skilled nursing facility
- **Wellness/Fitness Center**—any program catering to the older population

that is part of a health club, hospital-based wellness center, or seniors center

NuStep announced the results of its 2008 awards contest at an event held during the American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging (AAHSA) Conference in October. University Living, an independent/assisted living community in Ann Arbor, Michigan, won the award for the senior living division; while the City of Rogers Adult Wellness Center (AWC), located in Rogers, Arkansas, collected the award for the wellness division. Each organization received a NuStep TRS 4000 Recumbent Cross Trainer; travel and hotel for, and recognition at, the NuStep event; and an inscribed NuStep Pinnacle Award trophy. Presentations were later held at each recipient’s site as well.



*Celebrating at the NuStep Pinnacle Award presentation were, (l to r), Don Farmer, City of Rogers Adult Wellness Center; Terri Garr, actress and NuStep spokesperson; Steve Sarns, NuStep; and June Smedley, University Living. Image courtesy of NuStep*

“The 2008 Pinnacle Award winners are two organizations with very different mindsets,” says Steve Sarns, NuStep’s vice president of sales and marketing. “AWC is new, progressive and incredibly dynamic,” comments Sarns. The facility’s vision “totally connects on wellness,” in his view—while membership has soared since the September 2006 opening. Moreover, “AWC is attracting a lot of younger seniors,” Sarns notes. “University Living, on the other hand, is

a small community that provides high-touch, thoughtful and caring service to residents, who tend to be older seniors. This location offers residents a wonderful wellness setting and great dignity.” What AWC and University Living have in common, he adds, is worthy programs and dedicated staff.

**Something for everyone**

When the City of Rogers opened its Adult Wellness Center in late 2006, it fulfilled a pledge made by Mayor Steve Womack to provide the older-adult population “with a place of their own,” says AWC Director Keri York Wilkinson. Almost 10 years went by from pledge to Pinnacle. But the ensuing journey “has been filled with rewards and challenges.”

One relevant challenge for Rogers is rapid growth—not only in the age 50-plus age group, but also in the overall population. To be able to meet the demands of the region in the long term, the city recognized years ago that it needed to change “from a ‘bedroom’ community to a city with a ‘destination’ character,” Womack recently said. The state-of-the-art Adult Wellness Center reinforces this new identity, with AWC members coming from 80 cities across the region.

“From the very beginning, we saw the AWC as an opportunity to offer something new to age 50-plus adults,” notes Assistant Director Lesli Ossenfort. “We set out to create programming that would reach the unmet needs of the Boomer group, while still serving the needs of the oldest-old,” Wilkinson

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**Want more information?**

For more information about the NuStep Pinnacle Awards, call NuStep toll-free at 800-322-2209 or visit [www.nustep.com/inside/pinnacle.html](http://www.nustep.com/inside/pinnacle.html).

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*The 55,000-sq.-ft. City of Rogers center includes a popular therapy pool. Image courtesy of the City of Rogers Adult Wellness Center*

adds—an approach that would offer something for everyone, regardless of a member's age and activity level.

“Before the AWC opened, we decided upon the mission to improve quality of life through whole-person wellness for adults 50 years of age and older,”

Wilkinson continues. To help individuals enrich their quality of life, however, AWC leaders recognized that the curriculum had to address all areas of wellness. By the facility's launch, staff had developed “calendars full of activities,” she states. And offerings have only grown since then.

“All of our programs are designed to enhance physical, mental and social well-being,” Wilkinson reports. These activities are supported by the many amenities in the 55,000-sq.-ft. building, including an arts and crafts studio, library and computer lab, dining room and demonstration kitchen, games/meeting rooms, lounge and social areas, as well as a wellness studio, therapy pool, activity pool, fitness center, and gymnasium.

Moreover, plans to expand the facility are already underway, according to Wilkinson. But in 2008, “the biggest change to the AWC will come with expansion to the outdoors,” she advises, mentioning a three-acre park now under construction behind the facility.

“The range of activities we offer is purposeful, to attract many different interests,” explains Wilkinson. “Our goal is to entice those only focused on one dimension of wellness into focusing on multiple areas. Often it happens that people come to the facility to participate in a sedentary activity, and they are enticed by our nonintimidating fitness center and begin exercising. Each month brings new and varied offerings,” which keep members engaged. “The success of the AWC is propagated by its state of constant change,” stresses Wilkinson.

An AWC member echoed this view to NuStep's Steve Sarns while he was on-site. After fielding questions about what he thought of the facility, Sarns asked the woman her opinion. “Every day is

like Christmas,” she replied. “Every day is new—something new to look forward to.”

“The needs of the aging population are changing,” says Wilkinson, “and the AWC is poised and ready to meet the dynamic needs of this growing group.” To keep membership accessible, the facility charges a \$25 membership fee and offers scholarships to those unable to afford it; caregivers of members in need are also allowed access.

How have older adults in the region responded to the new City of Rogers facility? In less than 16 months, more than 7,700 individuals have become members—with 4,000 joining in the first three months alone. Of note, a vast majority of members fall into either the 50–64 age group (45%) or 65–79 age group (45%).

“We have provided the older members of our community a place to congregate, socialize, exercise and thrive,” ends Fitness Coordinator Don Farmer, “and they have responded by fully supporting everything we do, by giving back in volunteer service, and by encouraging others to join.”

## **The personal touch**

Located in the college town of Ann Arbor, the aptly named University Living embraces a philosophy of “living with assistance” for residents. This community offers services throughout the continuum of care—independent and assisted living, as well as memory and respite care—to adults from 60 to 100 years old. Through its commitment to wellness, University Living nurtures a vibrant, engaging environment where residents have “the opportunity to maintain and enhance their emotional, intellectual, physical and spiritual life.”

Fitness and activities programs are at the core of University Living's wellness pro-

gram, according to Fitness Director June Smedley. The initiative is designed for and delivered to residents through an alliance between three departments in the community: Recreational Therapy, Resident Care, and Fitness—a comprehensive approach that fosters resident participation. Further, “we have really good communication and cooperation between all departments at University Living,” she says. “This has a trickle-down effect—keeping people informed, helping them do their jobs better, and helping them solve problems.”

The medically sound fitness program features personal training, fitness classes and special events. “Our fitness motto is ‘To preserve and protect,’” Smedley advises. This “acknowledges the importance of assisting our residents in the maintenance of strength, endurance and flexibility, while ensuring safety in exercise.” Two years ago, classes such as yoga, balance and stretch were added to the fitness program. Around that time, the fitness center more than tripled in space and gained higher visibility with a move to a new location—a “bright, sunny, welcoming environment,” adds Marketing Director Janine Rosenbergh. Recently, the 1,000-ft. center was renamed Preservation Station by residents, to reflect the role of exercise in self-care.

To encourage residents to participate in fitness, Smedley seeks out new residents and invites them to join the program; she also provides gentle reminders for current residents and brings them to the center when it’s time to work out, as they often don’t have a perception of time. “We also have an important link between physical therapy and the Fitness Department,” she comments. “When residents complete in-house physical or occupational therapy, they will receive a discharge statement; I then approach them and say they are transitioning to exercise.” This statement has been “instrumental” in keeping people engaged in activity after therapy.



*The fitness center at University Living offers a bright, inviting atmosphere for residents. Image courtesy of University Living*

Partnerships with the University of Michigan (UM) and other learning institutions provide a strong foundation for intellectual wellness offerings, which are planned as part of the activities program. UM students and faculty join residents for ongoing current events classes and a lecture series, featuring professors from UM, in which residents help choose the topics. Other guest lecturers also present lectures at the community. “Our lecture series means a lot to residents,” Rosenbergh says. “They love the mental stimulation, as well as the interaction with younger generations.”

The population at University Living “represents the potential of the oldest adults as they strive to live a quality life,” Smedley believes. Residents are happier and healthier as a result of wellness program participation—and staff and family members notice. “Lots of people stop by to express how happy they are that their family member is here and that we have all this in place for them,” offers Rosenbergh. “We’re providing the whole picture, and we know we’re making a difference in the lives of the people who live here. We’re working in connection with residents to make the best of whatever they are capable of.”

Rosenbergh acknowledges that “as facilities go, University Living is rather small—we’re at capacity at 75 people.” But, she adds, “we pride ourself on our ability to ‘get our arms around’ all our residents. We’re able to be more personal with them, which does take effort,” she admits. “But we’ve made a decision to

interact at that level with residents and to maintain it.” This personal touch creates a family-like atmosphere in the community.

For Steve Sarns, an encounter with a University Living resident cemented this perception. “When I first moved in, I would have dreams of being back in my old home,” this woman told him. After two years at University Living, “I don’t have those dreams anymore,” she said. “The community is my home now.”

### **Inspiring the industry**

The 2008 NuStep Pinnacle Awards showcase two organizations that provide inspiring models for the industry. Through their dedication and commitment to excellence, the City of Rogers Adult Wellness Center and University Living are supporting health, well-being and quality of life for their members and residents. “There were numerous worthy candidates submitted for this year’s Pinnacle Awards,” says Steve Sarns. “But these honorees showed amazing creativity in their accomplishments in serving seniors and creating innovative wellness programs. Both organizations are well-deserving of this award.”

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