

Community ownership growing for Green House Living project

Last Tuesday our community celebrated the imminent success of building Green House cottages in Sheridan — places where the focus is on elders continuing their life journey with dignity and respect.

Gov. Dave Freudenthal flew in to be with us and cheer us on. He echoed the sentiments of many of the more than 120 people attending the event — that this is an effort similar to a “barn raising.”

He commended our community for taking this on with a true Wyoming “can do” spirit. We are the only location in the nation that is accomplishing this through the efforts of passionate citizens and not through an existing facility or institution.

Just one year ago our goal was to raise \$3.3 million. Today this goal has decreased to \$812,000. Even though this was one of the most difficult financial environments in near history, our dedicated fundraising team, led by Barbara Walter and Dr. Sy Thickman, did not give up.

One hundred percent of the board and task force have made substantial contributions in time and money. They became involved because of their individual experiences with older loved ones

and their anticipation of the future.

To briefly revisit the history of the nursing home industry, how it has changed, and why the evolution needs to continue, just look back to the '50s and '60s. Many may remember the cottage industry built by “empty nesters” taking elders in need of care into their homes.

Concerned about the safety of the people living in these unregulated homes, the federal government became involved in the '60s and funded a program to build large nursing homes in the medical model — much like hospitals. They became places where life was characterized by loneliness, helplessness, abandonment and boredom.

The Green House movement envisioned by Dr. Bill Thomas is now taking us back to the social model restoring human dignity while ensuring the safety of the elders.



Center Stage

Kay Wallick



are there to protect and sustain the elders — the difference is that they are doing everything with rather than to them. To avoid slipping back into institutional thinking, the question must always be asked, “Does what we are doing enlarge the capacity for the elder to experience the richness of life?”

The role of the staff in a Green House is to sustain the elders through the practices of homemaking, befriending and building convivium (friendly gatherings in the center of the home).

Nursing homes in Sheridan and throughout the country are to be commended for beginning to make important

The elements required for human survival are simple and few — calories, water, vitamins, minerals, and air ... and, of course shelter. However, it is affection and respect that bring meaning and purpose to daily life.

The caregivers in Green Houses

culture changes within their facilities. Together, we need to abolish today's versions of nursing homes so that no elder has to fear living the later part of life in a place that feels like an institution.

Studies over a period of time in a Green House environment have shown improved quality of life, quality of care, family satisfaction and staff satisfaction when compared to traditional nursing homes.

If you want to know more, join us at Fulmer Library on Wednesday, Feb. 3, from 10 to 11 a.m. in the Inner Circle for an informal Q&A.

A sense of community ownership is building for the Green House project in Sheridan. It is the right project at the right time.

Envision with us — if 800 citizens would pledge \$1,000 over a three-year period, we would meet our goal and groundbreaking would commence.

Author Kay Wallick is project coordinator with Green House Living for Sheridan.

Center Stage is written by friends of the Senior Center for the Sheridan community. It is a collection of insights and stories related to living well at every age.