

August 21, 2023

LiveWell bets \$50M campus renovation will pave way for future of dementia care



PHOTO | MICHELLE TUCCITTO SULLO

Maley Hunt, chief operating officer, and Michael Smith, president and CEO, pose in front of ongoing construction at LiveWell's dementia care campus in Southington.

By Michelle Tuccitto Sullo

While many elder care facilities are struggling financially or even closing, dementia-focused LiveWell is in the midst of a massive \$50 million expansion and renovation project at its campus in the Plantsville section of Southington.

It's a major project in an industry that has faced many challenges — from financial woes to staffing shortages.

Earlier this year, the Hughes Health and Rehabilitation Center in West Hartford announced it would close, citing factors such as higher costs, the trend toward home and community-based services, and declining occupancy and state assistance.

But LiveWell sees its project as an investment to ensure its long-term financial viability and growth, by responding to future trends in health care and giving people what they want.

ADVERTISEMENT

“The places I do see that are closing haven't adapted to the changing expectations of clients,” said Michael Smith, LiveWell's president and CEO. “You can't continue in (traditional) settings and expect to be vibrant in the future.”

LiveWell, a not-for-profit care provider that formed in 1990, was formerly known as the Alzheimer's Resource Center of Connecticut Inc. It is solely focused on providing services for people with Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

Its 8-acre campus features nursing, assisted living and adult day facilities at 1261 South Main St.

To align with changing customer preferences, LiveWell's expansion involves transitioning to more assisted living beds as opposed to nursing home beds. It is also providing more community services, to help support those with dementia who aim to stay at home as long as possible.

People with dementia who still live at home run the risk of being isolated, which can be detrimental to disease progression, Smith said.

ADVERTISEMENT

“People can benefit from some social connection,” he said. “We give people resources so they can live at home.”

The project will allow LiveWell, which employs about 220 workers, to reach more people with dementia, both on and off campus, by expanding its adult day and home care capacity. That will improve its long-term financial profile, Smith said.

In fiscal 2021, ending Sept. 30, LiveWell reported nearly \$22 million in revenue and \$3.8 million in net income, according to its latest available 990 tax form.

Early decisions

The state Department of Social Services has partnered with Mercer Government Human Services Consulting to better understand the future need and support for long-term healthcare services in Connecticut.

CT NURSING HOME FACILITY OCCUPANCY RATES BY COUNTY				
	2019	2020	2021	2022
HARTFORD	89%	75%	78%	82%
NEW HAVEN	87%	74%	79%	86%
MIDDLESEX	84%	75%	74%	77%

Source: Connecticut Annual Nursing Facility Census

Mercer has projected an increased demand for home care and community-based services, with an estimated need for 6,000 fewer nursing home beds in Connecticut by 2040.

ADVERTISEMENT

While the desire to live in institutional semi-private skilled nursing care is expected to continue to decline, dementia is becoming more common, notes Smith.

As of 2020, there were roughly 55 million people worldwide with dementia, a number expected to grow to 78 million by 2030, according to London-based Alzheimer’s Disease International.

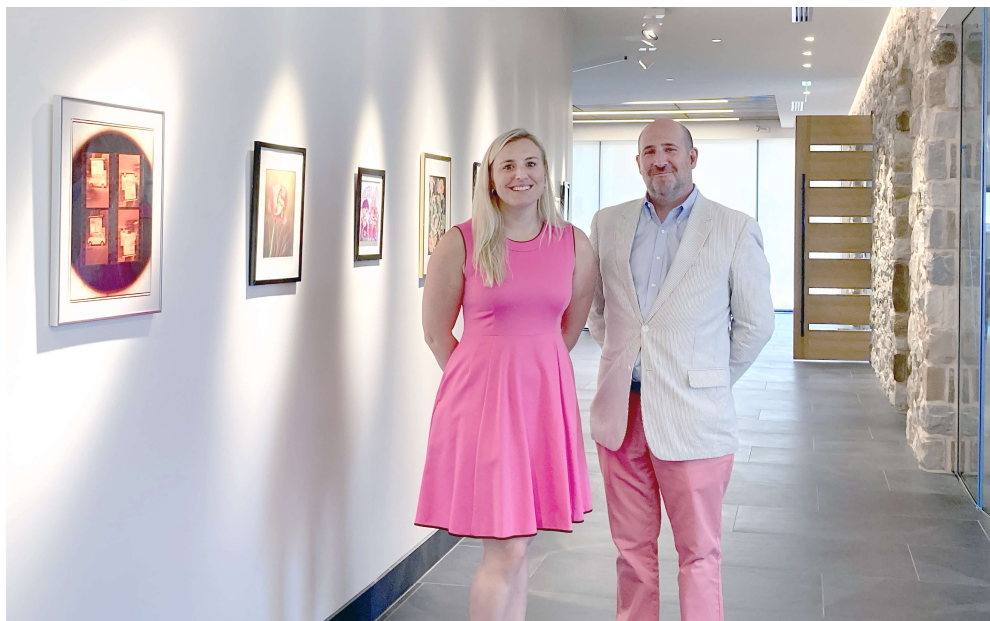


PHOTO | MICHELLE TUCCITTO SULLO

Artwork is on display for residents and visitors to enjoy at the LiveWell campus. Pictured are Maley Hunt, chief operating officer, and Michael Smith, president and CEO.

LiveWell's leadership said it aims to engage people with early impairment so they can make decisions about their future, as opposed to family members doing so when they are further along in their disease.

Construction at the LiveWell campus started in 2022. The work is being done in phases, with the entire project on track to be finished by mid-2024.

Before the project began, LiveWell offered 120 skilled nursing beds and 13 assisted living units.

ADVERTISEMENT

Once finished, this ratio will change dramatically to 76 skilled nursing beds and 65 assisted living units. The project also will increase campus capacity from 133 to 141 residents.

The Connecticut Health and Educational Facilities Authority in 2022 approved an \$81.6 million bond package for LiveWell, with the bulk going toward the project's construction and operation.

The project includes a new 20,000-square-foot Center for Resilient Living, plus new homes. The last phase involves renovations to the original facility.

The center will expand LiveWell's home and community-based services, which target both its residents and nonresidents.

The center's services aim to help slow down dementia's progression and give people hope, via in-person, virtual and hybrid programming.

ADVERTISEMENT

"Managing blood pressure, reducing stress, addressing hearing loss, focusing on nutrition and sleep, physical activity, cognitive fitness and social connection – these are all key," Smith said.

The nearly finished new center includes amenities such as a social hub and café. There is a test kitchen where people can take classes on how to cook for brain health. A studio for performances and movies can accommodate up to 145 people.

The center also features a greenhouse, fitness center, yoga and movement studios, and an art studio to take classes in writing, pottery, painting and theater.

Wall art will change periodically. It will have maker spaces, a learning lab, technology center and classrooms, outdoor dining, and outdoor exercise and play spaces. Hydrotherapy and massage beds help with relaxation and reducing stress.

The Bradley Henry Barnes and Leila Upson Barnes Memorial Trust awarded a \$150,000 grant that LiveWell is using for fitness and relaxation equipment.

ADVERTISEMENT

The center also features a health clinic where people can get physician and psychiatric care, therapy and counseling, physical, occupational and speech therapy, and other nutrition and wellness services.

Finishing touches were being put on the new center as of late July, and LiveWell anticipates having a full certificate of occupancy in the fall of 2023.

"It is not a senior center or basic adult space," Smith said. "It is a dynamic space for people who want to be a part of redefining life with dementia. LiveWell wants to give people a sense of optimism."

Maley Hunt, LiveWell's chief operating officer, said people don't have to live on campus to get access to its services.

"We focus on prevention, timely diagnosis and providing resources for people to have more control over their lives," Hunt said.

ADVERTISEMENT

New living spaces

Also under construction are new multi-story residential buildings that LiveWell calls its "River Homes."

They feature eight bedrooms, eight and a half baths and shared custom kitchen space. Residents will be able to enjoy features such as a four-season sunroom, living and family rooms, parlor, study, indoor and outdoor fireplaces, outdoor decks overlooking the Quinnipiac River and garages, according to Hunt.

These are expected to be ready to open this fall.

Couples are welcome to live at LiveWell, even if only one spouse has dementia, so they aren't separated.

ADVERTISEMENT

In many elder care facilities, those with dementia might typically be in a special, locked section, away from others, according to Smith.

LiveWell avoids this by using technology to track people and ensure safety, such as with geofencing and wearable devices. This allows residents more freedom to move around the campus.

"We are trying to redefine life with dementia," Hunt said.

In 2024, LiveWell will be renovating its original footprint, the project's final phase.

Spaces where clients live currently will be revamped and updated with a goal of supporting resident privacy and autonomy.

ADVERTISEMENT

Strategies for sustainability, growth

As the elder care industry continues to encounter challenges, there are several ways facilities can adapt to be financially successful, according to Kendra Nicastro, director of business development with healthcare consultant LeaderStat.

In addition to providing exceptional care, having a particular specialty, such as outpatient therapy or dementia services, can help.

Care facilities should also develop a recruitment and retention plan to stabilize staffing and drive employee satisfaction, Nicastro said.

"Quality of care stems from staff satisfaction, and it is difficult to achieve quality and satisfaction with high turnover," she said.

ADVERTISEMENT

While several elder care facilities in Connecticut have complained of high turnover and staffing issues, Smith said that hasn't been the case at LiveWell.

"When you do things well, you support the viability of the organization and its mission," Smith said.



Sign up for Enews

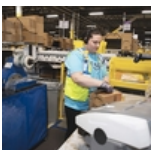
Most Popular



Meet HBJ's 2023 40 Under Forty class



2023 40 Under Forty: Kristin Campanelli



Winstanley Enterprises pays \$122.3M for Windsor Amazon warehouse

