



A Virtual Evening To Recognize High-Quality Caregiving

The 2021 Community Choice Award Finalists

The stories of nine (9) Community Choice Award finalists are listed below.

Read about their dedication to their work in long-term care and how they brighten the lives of those around them!

Vote once per day until February 25 for the individual that you think best exemplifies “Quality Long-Term Caregiving.”

Dan Ojeda

Organization: Ascension Living Sherbrooke Village

Title/Credentials: Director of Environmental Services

Years in Position: 1-3 years

Dan Ojeda is an associate that any community would welcome with open arms. As Director of Environmental Services, his job has been more demanding than ever with COVID. No matter what challenge is brought to him, his answer is “yes”, and he is off running. Dan has been instrumental in the success of our community during COVID. He implemented all necessary cleaning procedures immediately. He is willing to assist his team with cleaning of any room or helping move a resident. There is not a day that goes by that you don’t see him wearing our backpack sprayer and spraying the community, cleaning up debris from the community, or helping with a variety of tasks that are outside the norms of his department. No matter how big the challenge is, he always completes it with a smile and success! Dan was vital to this community prior to COVID however we would not be where we are today without his dedication to our campus.

George Walker

Organization: Friendship Village Sunset Hills

Title/Credentials: Assisted Living Specialist

Years in Position: Less than 1 year

I started working in senior living when I was just 15 while seeing my grandfather's fight with Alzheimer's. He was still living at home during this and my family and I had daily tasks to care for him. As an 8th-grader, my job was to shave him every morning and then I would spoon feed him his breakfast before going out to catch my school bus. I was always grateful to have my grandfather at home with us until the very end of his illness. And seeing his struggle made me want to help seniors.

After he passed, my very first part time job was as a dishwasher and server at a skilled nursing facility. I absolutely loved it. It was like gaining 80 more grandparents overnight! I worked there for over 7 years, through high school and college and only left after I received my degree and became a high school English teacher for seven years, but my heart was in senior living and I really wanted to get back to that.

Helping seniors as well helping their families through the transition to senior living is a passion for me because I know how important it is and I always feel appreciated. COVID has made this past year extremely difficult not only for our current residents and families, but also for families who can't wait any longer to make the move. But I'm so grateful to be here for them and when I see that I'm making a difference in their lives, it's amazing.

One of my favorite things in the community is simply to be able to do activities with the residents. I especially love dancing for and with the residents whenever our community hosts live entertainment or if any music was playing. Spending time with our residents is always great. I just enjoy their company and having so many amazing conversations. They have lived very full lives, so getting to hear their stories is a treat, no matter how short or long our conversations are. Sometimes it's just a brief moment where something is shared. I just love it.

Kim Bayne

Organization: AccuCare Home Health

Title/Credentials: Private Duty Aide

Years in Position: 3-6 years

Homecare is a profession which requires a variety of skills. And, as a caregiver, if you exude compassion and love, the client will feel that compassion and love. Years ago, Kim lost her daughter. Instead of focusing on the loss of her daughter and what could be, Kim decided to give back and make a difference in the lives of others. Upon returning to work her first client was a gentleman who was terminal. As she was caring for him towards the end of his life, he

asked Kim to hold his hand. As she held his hand, he stated “You have such a gentle touch. This is perfect for you” then he passed. She sets the tone for the family of what to expect when they have no previous experience with homecare and often, do not yet know what questions to ask. She is proactive by making suggestions as to what type of equipment will be helpful, or an activity schedule that might enrich her client’s daily life. Kim’s knowledge as well as that gentle touch, confidently applied, is just the RIGHT touch for her clients. She is an amazing asset to our team.

Lakeithia Miles

Organization: Frontier Health and Rehab
Title/Credentials: Business Office Manager
Years in Position: 1-3 years

As business office manager, Lakeithia is directly responsible for communicating the financial needs of our residents to their families and insurance companies. One could not ask for someone more devoted to advocating above and beyond for every resident we have, and her kindness, empathy, and genuine care for our residents lives in every one of her actions. She will drop everything to make sure a resident's needs are being addressed in the most timely manner possible, and she has never shied away from a task that, while not necessarily her responsibility, would improve the lives of everyone under our roof.

Manny Teferi

Organization: Friendship Village Chesterfield
Title/Credentials: Food and Beverage Director
Years in Position: 1-3 years

Manny has been involved with food and hospitality all his life. “My uncle owned Bar Italia (in St. Louis) when I was growing up, so being in that restaurant environment at an early age, I just felt it.” He earned his undergraduate degree in Hotel and Restaurant Management from Mizzou before returning to Saint Louis where he would eventually earn his master’s degree in Management Leadership from Webster. Manny says he loves food service in senior living as opposed to other things like business dining or corporate events which are a little stale and impersonal for him. In senior living, he can make long-term, personal connections with people around him, serving the same people every day. “I like that personal feeling and the second I entered senior living dining I knew I’d do it for the rest of my career,” he said. In 2018, Manny became the Dining Room Manager at Friendship Village and was quickly promoted to his current role of Food & Beverage Director. In that time, Manny has seen a lot and has thrived in a trial by fire during the pandemic. For much of the time of COVID, the dining staff has had to make huge adjustments to shifting from dining room service to deliveries to residents’

apartments. It was a necessary shift, but it can also make residents feel isolated and depressed in their apartments during lockdowns and quarantines. "When people you've known for years start to decline; you can turn their day around," he says. "I asked one resident that hadn't been feeling well lately what he likes and what brightens his day, and he told me, 'Stewed tomatoes.' I made him a big plate of stewed tomatoes, took it to his room for free and knocked on his door. It absolutely made his day. That's the type of stuff that really touches you." And when things are a more normal at Friendship Village, Manny also excels in making connections with residents to add special touches to their dining experiences and their lives. He takes so much pride in his work...and it shows. "It's just fun," says Manny. He loves helping to serve during important moments for residents. Recently he set up a party to help a couple celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary and they had a wonderful time. Manny says he lives for those special moments. "My mantra is to pretend as if every resident is one of my parents. If it were my parents, what would I do?" Manny says. Asking himself that question always makes any decision he may be wrestling with at the time a whole lot easier."

Marianne Taylor

Organization: Right at Home St. Charles

Title/Credentials: Caregiver

Years in Position: 1-3 years

Marianne will be 81 years old this March. She is an amazing person and caregiver. Marianne is willing to take on any client! She is especially good with dementia clients. Marianne works closely with her clients and their needs, earning their trust, engaging them in activities that they can no longer do on their own, assisting them into the shower and taking them out for lunch. She continues to work 20-30 hours a week and is always willing to help us in a last-minute crunch! She communicates with the office constantly regarding any concerns about her clients, will reply to any message sent with a great attitude! Marianne is also very tech savvy which is amazing at 81 years old! She has also come to many of our events, including the Alzheimer's walk.

Mark Fitzgerald

Organization: Frontier Health and Rehab

Title/Credentials: Manager of Social Services, LCSW

Years in Position: 6-10 years

Mark is the go-to person for answers, help, calmness and tranquility. He is such a good listener and if he doesn't know the answer, he always knows who does. He always has a smile on his face. His tone of voice just lets you know you are in good hands and you will be taken care of. My job is so much easier with Mark in one of my buildings. I don't know what we would do without him.

Stacey Long

Organization: Ascension Living Sherbrooke Village

Title/Credentials: Director of Dining Services

Years in Position: More than 10 years

Stacey Long is a wonderful asset to our community for many years. Teamwork is at the center of everything she does. She consistently goes above and beyond. Even though we often tell her to take a day off, she rarely listens. You will find Stacey here almost every day for all three meals. She does everything possible to make a resident's life full of a higher quality. She knows the importance of dining in each of their lives and strives for perfection in her department. Managing the dietary department during COVID was

no easy task. She made sure to always comply with whatever recommendations came from DHSS and the CDC. She quickly converted her meal service once it was recommended to stop communal dining. Realizing how important that part of each person's day is, she consistently looked for ways to make their day special. She provided individually bagged snacks for happy hours or activities. She also participated in several associate events to lift their morale. The word "NO" is not in her vocabulary, instead it is what can I do to help. Life at our community is so much better with Stacey!

Veronica Osieyo

Organization: Friendship Village Chesterfield

Title/Credentials: Village Care Center Receptionist

Years in Position: 6-10 years

Veronica is native to Kenya and has worked at Friendship Village for over eight years. She started working as a receptionist in Kenya where she then moved on into marketing, assisting people in different ways. "Hospitality has been my life," she says. As the receptionist in the Village Care Center, Veronica directs people and phone calls, helps with transportation and care plans, and handles any other details which need needs attention at the front desk. Working in the Care Center requires an extra commitment to helping people who really need to be able to lean on our staff and Veronica always has an extra eye out, looking for what people really need. To Veronica, her job goes way beyond her job description.

During the pandemic, loneliness can be common for everyone, but especially for seniors. Residents can feel isolated, especially during quarantines and lockdowns and this often means not being able to see friends and family as much. So checking in on people is more important than ever. Veronica takes this need to heart. She frequently takes the extra time to go to residents, to visit with them, to listen to them, and to let them know they aren't alone – Veronica cares about her job and cares about people. It's a special thing.

"It's exciting every day," she says. She has adopted both the residents and employees as family. "I wake up every morning looking forward to come to work," she says. One of the residents would request to come and sit with her at the reception desk the whole day, virtually every day. Veronica was happy to do it. For another resident, she would visit him every day and sing "You Are My Sunshine" to him to keep his spirits up. Whenever he was feeling down, the nurses would call Veronica and she would sing to

him over the phone. "I made a difference in his life and that's what makes me happy," Veronica recalled.

She says the residents fulfill her as much as she cares for them. For five years, she asked one resident on his way to church each Sunday to pray for her, and he always did. On the last Sunday before he passed, he told his family how many countless times he prayed for her at church, and the family even included Veronica in his obituary. Veronica says her life's motto is that whatever you put out; it will come back to you. And Veronica takes countless opportunities to put goodness into the world.