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After careful design, Alverno Memory Care unit opens

By Nathan Blake Digital Content Editor Sep 16, 2016



Nathan Blake/Clinton Herald

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As Marla Jo McQuiston prepared for the noise and dust of renovation, she wondered what she could do to help make the period of construction more tolerable for the residents. She and many others who work in the Alverno Memory Care unit worried the renovation process would be disruptive to the residents. To get the experience off to a positive start, she decided to host a demolition party. Residents were given inflatable sledgehammers so they could pretend to be involved with knocking down the old nursing station.

McQuiston, a licensed practical nurse who works as the day-shift charge nurse, says the residents ended up enjoying the construction and renovation process. They felt like they were collaborators, or even supervisors, of the contractors who remodeled and refreshed the unit.

McQuiston has worked at the Alverno Long Term Care facility for seven years. She became the primary nurse in the Memory Care unit three years ago. She has a lot of experience working with patients who have dementia. She says it takes a special person to care for them.

The Memory Care unit, also known as Memory Lane, contains a "neighborhood" that can accommodate up to 28 residents who have been affected by dementia or Alzheimer's disease. This neighborhood is staffed by certified dementia practitioners.

Administrator Libby Goodman says the staff was ultimately a little more annoyed by the dust and noise. There were some minor difficulties during the construction process. McQuiston recalled having to go from a large nurses station to a little cubby for a while.

"It is nice to have a door now," McQuiston noted.

The renovations resulted in extensive changes to the Memory Care unit at the Alverno Long Term Living facility. Planning for the project started in 2015 and construction began in January 2016. The renovations were completed in May and a ribboncutting was June 23.

One of the most important parts of the planning phase was making sure that the selected paint colors for flooring, furniture and walls achieved an appropriate level of contrast. Because many of the residents have low vision, seats and furniture need to stand out from the colors on the walls and floor.

The way the rooms are set up is also strategic, according to Director of Marketing and Development Deb Bergmann.

"Design features are intended to cue residents as to the purpose of the room," Bergmann said.

In addition to the physical construction of the unit, the Memory Care facility also has a very structured schedule. There are a lot of planned activities for the residents throughout the day. The staff is tasked with keeping Memory Lane residents as involved in their neighborhood as much as possible without overwhelming them.

"Structure provides a sense of safety and security for them," Bergmann said.

The remodel of Memory Lane included updates to all floors and walls, as well as changes or additions to seven different locations.

The residents' rooms were completely remodeled. They received new walls, flooring, furniture and lighting. The biggest change is the addition of light dimmers, which help residents with memory problems keep track of the time of day.

The old nursing station was removed and converted into a living space. This is intended to be an inviting living room area. It features an aviary and new furniture. An office space for the certified nursing assistants also is featured in this area.

A family room was added to create a quiet space outside of the residents' room. These are larger spaces for visits with family members. The couches also convert into beds so that they can accommodate family members who wish to spend the night.

The activity room entrance was changed and now features French doors and re-organized space. The dining area was altered and now includes a servicing cove. The walls of this area are decorated with signs and other cues to remind residents that this is the area for dining. The cues are also intended to remind them to eat.

The traditional nursing station was replaced with a nurses "nook" that is located off the hallway.

One final change, and one that the residents and staff are very impressed with, is the new entrance. In order to create a warmer, more inviting entrance, a mural was painted Susan Holgersan and Mari Naga on the doors. The mural features several aspects of the exterior of The Alverno to help residents enter the neighborhood.

"The staff, residents and families are thrilled with the 'new' neighborhood," Goodman said. "We love watching them gather in the newly created spaces such as the living room. They are proud of their home."

The Alverno Long Term Living facility and Memory Care unit are located at 849 13th Ave. North in Clinton.



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