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Wachter aims to empower staff at Laurel View

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Aug 26, 2020



Submitted photo/

Rachel Wachter has been the administrator of the Health Care Center at Laurel View Village in Davidsville since late April.

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Since her arrival in late April, Rachel Wachter — administrator of the Health Care Center at Laurel View Village in Davidsville — has gotten to know each of the center's residents and staff personally.

Meeting the families of residents at the skilled nursing care center, however, has been more difficult because of the visitation restrictions put in place amid the novel coronavirus pandemic. Her contact with the families, until very recently, has been only by telephone.

"It's a challenge right now," she said, "but the residents and their families have been very gracious and welcoming.

"It's a family here — staff, residents and their families. I'm proud and humbled to be welcomed with such open hearts."

Wachter, 34, has worked in the field of aging services for 12 years, most recently as administrator at The Lutheran Home at Hollidaysburg.

After graduating from Penn State University with a bachelor's degree in human development and family studies/gerontology, she worked in hospice services, guardianship and protective services for older adults and as a social services/admissions director and administrator at a skilled nursing facility in Blair County. She became a certified dementia practitioner in 2017 and a licensed nursing home administrator in 2018.

"Growing up, I was a person who always gravitated to the older population," she said. "My grandparents were a big part of my life, and I always felt this was where my heart was. I wanted to work and serve that population.

"At Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries, I got an aha moment that this (career) fits, and I've never second-guessed it. I almost feel that I can't give enough to these people because I'm getting so much back from them."

As the administrator for the Health Care Center, Wachter is in charge of its day-to-day operations, following regulations from the state Department of Health and making sure the facility is safe for both the residents and staff.

"A big part of my job is to empower the staff," she said, "to help them grow as leaders within their field, so they feel empowered enough to make a difference."

Making time to visit with the residents is an important part of the job as well, Wachter said.

“I’m out interacting with the residents in the dining room — that is the best part of my day,” she said. “We are going to keep as much dignity and respect and choice in their lives as we possibly can. If you’re that person, a little bit of dignity and respect goes such a long way.”

And when an extra pair of hands is needed, she is ready to pitch in and help get things done.

“You cannot provide quality care if you’re not willing to work beside the staff,” she said. “That builds respect when you’re willing to step in and help out.

“That’s how I want to be (as an administrator), to have staff reach out to me. We’re in this together — and right now, more so than ever.

“I wouldn’t, and couldn’t, do my job without them.”

Wachter also works closely with Amanda Snyder, the administrator of the personal care center Tim Mock, the CEO and the board of directors of Allegheny Christian Ministries, the not-for-profit corporation that owns and operates Laurel View Village.

“I truly feel like part of the team,” she said. “They welcomed me with open arms. The staff and team here are incredible — I feel like I’ve been here longer.

“At Laurel View Village, no one goes through a challenge alone — resident, family or staff person. There’s always someone here to provide support, to talk or to pray with you. The support here is top-notch.”

The challenge of the current pandemic has also strengthened the resolve of the area’s elder care community, Wachter said.

“The other continuing care communities here have all been supportive and reaching out,” she said. “We’re a support system for each other. This community is really ready to rally and do whatever we need to do.

“COVID-19 has been a challenge for Laurel View Village, like everyone else in the world. Every day we have conversations about how we continue to keep people’s dignity and choice while keeping residents and staff safe. Laurel View Village is prepared and will operate like we always have . . . and provide quality care.”

Wachter is a professional musician as well. She has played the harp since the age of 5, and she performs as a solo artist as well as giving lessons to students.

She feels strongly about the benefits of music and the arts, and she intends to play for the residents at Laurel View Village once the pandemic is over, she said.

Wachter also enjoys cycling, hunting and camping with her husband and their two young daughters, ages 11 and 7. The family lives in Altoona with two German shepherds and a domesticated rabbit.

Beth Ann Miller

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