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Park View Care Center Receives Award for Innovative Dining Services

Park View Care Center of Buffalo was honored with the Innovation of the Year Award by the Minnesota Health and Housing Alliance (MHHA) at a ceremony in Minneapolis on Feb. 7. A video about the care center's dining services was shown to a standing-room-only crowd in the Hyatt Hotel ballroom.

The video told the story of a new era in care center food service being employed at Park View, where residents enjoy eating restaurant-style rather in the traditional congregate settings where few choices were offered. The dining area there has been transformed into the Park Bistro. The benefits are more than in style; there are payoffs in improved health. Residents are offered menus that help them make healthy choices at the same time they pick foods to suit their individual tastes.

"Now as our residents enter their respective dining rooms, they are presented with a tri-fold vinyl menu and staff take their order for that meal. At each meal, the resident has the option of ordering the feature of the day or ordering from the rest of the menu. In addition, there is a special dessert each day," Administrator Ann Dirks said.

Residents are persuaded to order healthy foods by special marks on the menu that identify heart healthy foods and ways to denote carbohydrate counts for specific items. This way, residents gain experience choosing foods that fit their dietary needs.

One resident expressed pleasure with the system. "As a diabetic it is a big advantage to be able to decide on the food that I need and should have with the Park Bistro menu. It makes mealtime much more enjoyable," he wrote in the award nomination.

Resident Council President Susan Oswald also wrote in favor: "We always had good meals served, but now we are seeing a better variety. When we lived in our own homes and we had to make our own meals, we could decide each day what we felt like eating. Living in the care center, the meals just came to us depending on the day of the week. Now it feels like we are treating ourselves by going to a restaurant."

The change is not just about choice, it's about health. Notes Consulting Dietician Sheri Reuhle, "Monitoring clinical results of this new dining experience has been nothing short of phenomenal. The diabetic residents have shown no significant changes in their blood sugar readings. Residents have improved intakes and we are seeing little or no waste."

Park Bistro began in September 2007 and has been a true success for the 124-bed skilled nursing facility. Dr. Bob Milligan, director of geriatric services at the Buffalo Clinic, recounts how without prompting, residents began telling him how much they enjoy the food in their care center. He took note of the comments and wrote to Dirks: "My compliments for all your hard work. It's paying off!"

The award was presented at the 2008 MHHA Institute for Older Adult Services, the state's largest gathering of professionals working in care centers, assisted living settings and related services. The convention drew more than 3,000 people to Minneapolis under the theme "Building Blocks: Creating

the Future of Aging Services.” It focused on workforce issues, transforming aging services to meet the needs of a growing population of older Minnesotans and building public trust.

Over the three-day event, members of MHHA also honored caregivers, volunteers, organizational trustees, professional leaders, innovative practices, mission-driven work and community service. To learn more, and to find consumer information about older adult services, go to www.mhha.com.

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