

Lifestyles

TOPTON

SPRING
2009

'Workout for the brain' challenges residents as way of helping to keep mental abilities sharp

When her husband, Ralph, naps in the afternoon, Mae Gerhart starts her fitness training—training, that is, in “brain-fitness.”

Several times a week she'll make her way from her first-floor apartment to a second floor lounge area in Tower Court, part of the senior living accommodations at The Lutheran Home at Topton. There, she'll use one of the four Dakim Brain Fitness systems available for residents.

The Dakim Brain Fitness system helps older adults stay mentally sharp. The system offers reminders of youth, delivered by a technology designed specifically for older adults.

“It helps

me with my memory,” says Gerhart. “It asks questions about past events, shows you puzzles with missing pieces, asks you to look for items in a larger picture, and even shows you old movie clips and then asks you questions about what you saw. I like the whole thing.”

Gerhart says she really enjoys the simple math problems.

Resident Amelia DalMaso says she doesn't like doing the numbers recall, but also enjoys the math problems. “I also like when they give me scrambled

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Mae Gerhart gets her daily dose of brain fitness.



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'Workout for the brain' (continued)

letters and I have to make them into words," she laughs. "When I get them right it puffs up my ego a little."

Sue Fogel, community life events coordinator, says more than 30 residents use the four Dakim Brain Fitness units on a regular basis. With a touch of the screen, residents are asked to click on the letters corresponding to their initials; the computer "remembers" them, beginning their day's training right where they left off the last time.

"The computer uses voice and visual items to explain tasks and ask questions," Fogel says. "And if they get a question wrong, it lets them know in a very nice way and encourages them to try again. Residents are never left feeling bad if they didn't score perfectly each time." Even if an individual answers several questions wrong, the system adjusts so they then get several questions right and ultimately end on a positive note.

The fully automated system combines fun with rigorous mental exercise, focusing on six different brain functions—long- and short-term memory, critical thinking, computation, visual-spatial orientation, and language.

Each Dakim Brain Fitness unit presents thousands of games, puzzles, and other mind-exercising activities on a touch screen with no mouse or keyboard, enabling use by persons with few or no computer skills.

The activities incorporate current research on maintaining brain wellness, using colorful screen images, stories, voiceovers, and age-appropriate film and music clips to keep users engaged. Exercises range from anagrams and name-that-song challenges to TV-style scenes and narrated

literary passages complete with special effects. The narration includes follow-up questions requiring use of short-term memory and deductive reasoning.

"It's entertaining and it's interactive, giving residents an opportunity to use their cognitive skills in a positive way," says Karen Gottschall, community life director. "And as the word spreads about how much fun it is, the more people want to be a part of it."

Research shows that the more an individual stimulates

and utilizes his or her long-term memory, the longer that ability can be maintained. The Dakim Brain Fitness system targets games to the older individual's generation and employs skills they don't use everyday, and that helps to keep their minds sharp.

The system also can be set to employ photo-recognition to identify users as soon as they touch the screen, greeting them by name and adjusting for ability levels. Those levels range from active seniors to those with early-stage Alzheimer's disease. Content is updated every 24 to 48 hours to ensure that users don't experience the same activity twice.

"Researchers agree that successful aging requires continuing ongoing mental stimulation," says Dan Michael, Dakim founder and CEO. "The operative word is 'ongoing' because the benefits seem to lessen if you stop. That means that a brain-fitness program designed for seniors has to be enjoyable enough to keep people coming back for more. The Dakim Brain Fitness program is the first and only system created with that goal in mind. It may feel like a game, but it's really a rigorous workout for your brain."



Mae Gerhart and Amelia DalMaso work together to solve a puzzle.

Model home to feature technology of the future

To be built in three phases, the newest residential option on the campus of The Lutheran Home at Topton eventually will feature 70 new homes. But before dirt is moved in this new neighborhood called “Stone Crossing,” construction will begin on Topton’s “smart home.”

A reflection of what is to come in senior living accommodations, this special house will feature the new technology, construction, and universal design necessary to help individuals remain safely in their homes as they age.

In a nation in which 45 million people are over the age of 65, and 77 million “Baby Boomers” are waiting to retire, the construction of this home couldn’t come at a better time, says Dave Baker, chief information officer for Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries.

“We know the folks over 65 now have one or more chronic diseases that require a degree of formal or informal care due to loss of function,” he says. “We’re building this home to show them what exists to help them age in place.”

Planned technology will include sensors that

make it possible to monitor the home in a non-intrusive manner.

“The systems have remote sensors just like those in a security system. They can tell when someone walks in or out of a room,” Baker explains. “The system learns patterns, such as how often and at what time someone takes their medications. If the pattern changes, the information is sent to a caregiver who can respond.”

The home also will feature lighting and controls that assist with the visual changes that occur in an aging eye. Large-button light panels will allow the resident to adjust the lighting for night or day with one press of a switch.

“The technology that we have in our community common spaces, we’re taking to our living spaces,” says Baker. “We’re actually at a point where it is becoming affordable to install.”

The home also will feature wider hallways, zero-entry showers, and stove tops on which burners turn on when a pot is placed on them and off when it is removed.



“The key to the design is that it will be behind-the-scenes,” Baker says, adding that the technology will not look institutional or high-tech. “It has to be useful, easy, user-friendly, and look contemporary in today’s interior-design themes.”

The futuristic home is the product of Baker’s research and work done as a commissioner for a national coalition focused on helping older adults maximize their independence, support the needs of professional and family caregivers, improve the quality of care and life, reduce health-care costs, and increase service efficiency.

“We’re building the home simply to educate seniors, their family members, and staff to the possibilities that exist,” he says. “We also want to be a role model and show the way for other senior service providers, universities, and the general public and say, ‘Look what is available.’”

Construction of the model home is under way and expected to be completed by the fall. Watch for more information and an opportunity to tour this home, the first of its kind on the East Coast!

Want to learn more?

Dave Baker, chief information officer for Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries, who coordinated planning for the new “smart home” will make periodic presentations on the technology included in the design of the home at The Lutheran Home at Topton. To reserve your place at the next exciting presentation, call (610) 682-1413.



THE LUTHERAN
HOME AT TOPTON

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Environmental concerns drive recycling program

Long before many organizations acknowledged the value of recycling, The Lutheran Home at Topton was separating plastic, steel, and aluminum for reuse. But nearly two years ago, staff and residents took a more-focused approach when it came to “green programs” and started looking for multiple ways to nurture the environment.

Today, The Lutheran Home recycles everything from metals and cardboard to batteries and cooking fat.

“When Diakon instituted a corporate-wide ‘Go Green’ effort, we started looking campus-wide for ways to recycle,” says Paul Moriarty, facilities manager. “In fact, it became an agenda item at our weekly facilities management meeting.”

While Plant Operations recycles refrigerant and fluorocarbons, clean metals, batteries, appliances, used motor oil, and even leaves, other departments have joined in the effort as well. Culinary Services recycles cooking fat, purchases food from local farmers to save on gas and labor, and combines food-delivery dates to minimize travel expense. Residents recycle paper, glass, plastic, aluminum, steel cans, cardboard, and ink cartridges from printers. Even local businesses work with Moriarty and his staff to make recycling easier.

But can the momentum behind creative recycling efforts continue? Absolutely, Moriarty believes.

“There is an awareness about the environment and the impact our actions have on it that is keeping it in the forefront,” he says. “The fact that everyone wants to conserve and help the environment will keep it going.”



DIAKON...Going Green

YES, I WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION ON TOPTON!

Please cut along the dotted line and return to The Lutheran Home at Topton, One South Home Avenue, Topton, PA 19562.

I am interested in:

- Scheduling a visit to Topton
- Receiving an informational packet in the mail
- Receiving a phone call to answer some of my questions
- Receiving an e-mail with more information

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Phone: _____ Cell: _____

E-mail Address: _____

The Marketing Department works in close association with future residents' adult children, Realtors, movers, auctioneers, decorators, and bankers to make your move as stress-free as possible.

Employees find value in community service

When two employees of The Lutheran Home at Topton started volunteering for Meals on Wheels, they thought it would be a great way to give back to the community and help older adults. A few years and many meal deliveries later, they understand why it is better to give than receive.

The first Friday of every month, co-workers Connie Hartman and Meredith McCloskey head out to the Kutztown Senior Center where they pick up prepared meals and a delivery list. One will drive the car, while the other delivers the food.

"I usually chat with them a little bit, and ask how they are doing," says Hartman of the seniors, who often are homebound. "Some of them just want a hug."

In addition to the need for companionship, some seniors have turned to the pair when they are in need of services.

"We've had individuals we've provided meals to who have benefited from Topton's rehab services," says McCloskey.

But more than simply being a resource for seniors, McCloskey says, the volunteer efforts represent an extension of Diakon's mission to demonstrate God's command to love the neighbor through acts of service.

"That is what drives us," she says.



Influencing the future of senior services

To the casual observer, The Lutheran Home at Topton, a Diakon Senior Living Community, is focused on providing residents with a comprehensive senior living community. Behind the scenes, however, Diakon actively advocates for seniors and laws to improve their lives.

“We recognize that we not only have responsibility in day-to-day operations, but also in how we help to influence the future vision of senior services both in Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries and in a larger perspective,” says Tama Carey, senior vice president, Diakon Senior Living Services. “We do that through the education of all our constituencies, including legislators. We also work with organizations such as PANPHA (our state association of non-profit senior services), the American Association for Homes and Services for the Aging, and Lutheran Services in America.”

On the senior-living side, Diakon invites residents and other interested parties to participate in direct contact with legislators, when appropriate.

“We have encouraged residents and staff to communicate directly through letters, e-mails, and

phone calls,” Carey says. “Additionally, each senior living community sponsors a legislative event at least annually. We bring legislators on-site not only to tour our communities, but also to develop relationships and educate [them] in person. We want them to see us as a resource for any questions or issues that come up.”

Diakon also works with PANPHA on legislative advocacy initiatives, says Carey, who serves as chair-elect of the PANPHA board and chair of the PANPHA Public Policy Committee. Through all such efforts, she adds, Diakon is focused on “engaging more people to help create the future of aging services in Pennsylvania.”



Tama Carey



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