

Pulse

A publication of Bethesda Health Group, Inc. • Spring 2025

Fostering successful aging through
compassion and innovation

Signing, Smiling and Springing Forward



Bethesda Finalist in “Best Places to Work” Contest

For the ninth time in the past 13 years, Bethesda has earned the distinction of being named one of the “Best Places to Work” in St. Louis.

The contest, coordinated by Quantum Workplace and the *St. Louis Business Journal*, drew entries from more than 150 area businesses and organizations. Of those, 80 were selected as finalists.

Bethesda is a finalist in the Giant Companies category (750+ employees), competing alongside

Bunge, CarShield, Clayco and Washington University. Bethesda placed second in this category last year—our best finish to date.

The contest is based on survey responses from team members at each participating organization. Finalists and winners are determined by the quality and quantity of those responses. This year, more than 220 Bethesda team members completed the survey.

ST. LOUIS BUSINESS JOURNAL



BEST PLACES TO WORK

“You can’t be considered one of the ‘Best Places to Work’ if the team members don’t believe that they are working for an organization striving every day to do the right things for our residents and patients,” says **Caprina Wakefield**, Senior Vice President of Human Resources. “It’s very clear that we have that level of staff dedication here at Bethesda, and we continue to be recognized because of them.”

Congratulations to all Bethesda team members for making us one of the Best Places to Work in St. Louis!

“You can’t be considered one of the ‘Best Places to Work’ if the team members don’t believe that they are working for an organization striving every day to do the right things for our residents and patients.”

Caprina Wakefield, Senior Vice President of Human Resources

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Scan to view a complete list of our leadership team and board members.



Connect with us!



Terry Wharton—Bethesda's Biggest Kansas City Chiefs Fan

When **Terry Wharton** walks through the halls of Bethesda Southgate, she brings more than her medical expertise and warm smile—she brings the heart of a mother who's cheered from numerous sidelines. By day, she's a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) in Bethesda's float pool, admired for her calm presence and uplifting energy. But on game days? She's Bethesda's biggest Kansas City Chiefs fan—and that title runs deeper than team colors or touchdowns.

Terry's son, Tershawh Wharton, made it all the way from local youth leagues to the NFL, playing defensive tackle for the Chiefs and earning two Super Bowl rings along the way. But before the lights of Arrowhead Stadium and national broadcasts, there were early mornings, late-night talks and one very determined mom.

Tershawh started playing football at age eight, often underestimated because of his size. Meanwhile, Terry was balancing motherhood with a growing career in healthcare, becoming an LPN while Tershawh was still in middle school. The two shared a drive to succeed, and Terry's steady encouragement fueled her son's dream.

"After his freshman year at Missouri S&T, he told me he wanted to make it to the NFL," Terry recalls. "I was thrilled. But I also told him, 'Let's get to work and make it happen.'"

They did just that. By the time Tershawh graduated in 2020, he had caught the attention of scouts and signed with the Chiefs as an undrafted free agent. That same year, he earned a spot on the 52-man roster—and just months later, played in his first Super Bowl.

"Watching Tershawh on the field at the Super Bowl, living his dream, it was surreal," Terry says. "I was in Tampa for the game and was just so happy for him." She was also present for his Super Bowl victory in Las Vegas, and this year's loss to Philadelphia in New Orleans.

These days, Terry builds her work schedule around game days, whether she's in the stands or cheering from home alongside up to 40 family members and friends huddled around the television.

"Being in the float pool gives me flexibility," she says. "Watching him play, seeing him at his happiest is incredibly fulfilling."



*Proud Mom **Terry Wharton** celebrates with her son, Tershawh, at one of the many Super Bowls she attended and that he played in as a member of the Kansas City Chiefs.*

Terry brings that same spirit of support and encouragement to her patients at Bethesda. She often uses Tershawh's story to inspire her patients who sometimes could use a little extra motivation.

"There was a resident who loved football but needed a lift," she says. "I arranged for Tershawh to FaceTime her, and it changed everything."

In March 2025, Tershawh was traded to the Carolina Panthers. But Terry will still proudly wear her Chiefs red—unless, of course, they're playing the Panthers.

Whether it's on the job or in the stands, Terry Wharton shows what it means to care deeply and cheer loudly.

More Than Words: Building Community Through American Sign Language

When **Melinda “Mel” Bullock** and her husband, **Jim**, moved into Bethesda Terrace in November 2024, they were hopeful—but unsure what to expect. As a deaf couple, they relied on each other to navigate a world not always accommodating for them. Still, as they settled into their new home, one question lingered: Would they be able to truly connect with others here?

That hope hung quietly—until **Andrea Tripp**, Vice President and Senior General Manager at Bethesda Terrace, mentioned they had a deaf housekeeper and introduced them to **Melissa Geisler**. From the moment they signed hello to each other, Mel felt a spark of belonging.

“When I realized she was deaf too, I thought, ‘Wow, someone like me!’” Mel recalls. “Right then, I knew this was the place for us.”

Melissa, who has worked at Bethesda Terrace for 17 years, and Mel bonded quickly. Still, Mel and Jim’s experience highlighted a deeper challenge. While they had found a friend in Melissa, many

fellow residents weren’t sure how to interact with them—and vice versa. People smiled, waved and tried their best, but the conversations couldn’t go far.

One resident, **Jo Manion**, noticed right away.

“I saw new people were moving in who were deaf, and no one was talking to them,” Jo says. “I thought, ‘We need a way to bridge this gap, so they feel welcome here.’”

Jo began joining Mel at breakfast, where they passed notes, and Mel taught her some simple signs. That’s when Jo pitched the idea of hosting a sign language class to **Nikki Ross**, Bethesda Terrace’s Life Enrichment Coordinator, who thought it was a great idea.

Mel and Melissa teamed up with professional interpreter Ashley Yoch, whom Melissa knew through her church community. Ashley had interpreted in schools for five years and was excited to support their effort. On February 19, Bethesda Terrace hosted its first American Sign Language (ASL) class.



(L-R) **Melissa Geisler, Jo Manion and Mel Bullock** say “hello” before class begins.

“I figured maybe 10 people might show up,” Mel says. “Thirty-six came. I was flabbergasted!”

The class began with the ASL alphabet. Residents received handouts and joined in a finger-spelling game, watching as Mel and Melissa signed letters to form words. Then came everyday signs including “good,” “happy,” “eat,” “morning,” “please” and “thank you.”

Participants followed along, asking questions and encouraging one another. Laughter filled the room as they navigated their first signs, determined to get them right.

“Seeing so many people excited to learn sign language means the world to me,” Melissa says.

Since that first class, those lessons have spilled into everyday life. Residents now sign “good morning” and “thank you” in the hall. Some are even attempting short conversations.

“When they told me the classes were being scheduled, I teared up,” Jo says. “I never imagined it would turn into something this big.”

What began as a simple gesture has become something much deeper. At Bethesda Terrace, neighbors aren’t just learning to sign—they’re learning to connect.



Residents (l-r) **Nancy Fournier, Nancy Reinagel and Lynn Occhi** work hard to learn some of the words being taught at the American Sign Language class.

Making Every Swing Count at “Birdies for Bethesda”

Hosted by the Bethesda Health Group Foundation, the 3rd annual “Birdies for Bethesda” Golf Tournament continues to grow year after year, with the generous support of loyal and new sponsors alike.

This year, thanks to the sponsors and a record 400 golfers, “Birdies” raised \$200,000, so that Bethesda residents who have outlived their financial resources may remain living in their Bethesda home.

“This year we were exceptionally fortunate to have two Title Sponsors—Midwest Elevator, who returned for their third consecutive year, and CCL Hospitality, who joined us for the first time”, says **Linda Sanders**, Corporate Vice President and Director of Development. “Their support ensured an extremely successful Topgolf event!”

Two contest bays were added for the golfers this year, helping to add to the fun of the day. Golfers had a chance to win \$10,000 at the Hole-In-One bay sponsored by Paric; and a Topgolf package at our Longest Drive bay, sponsored by United Scripts. Unfortunately, no hole in one this year, but congrats to Adam from EmpiRX for winning the Longest Drive.

Once again, “Birdies for Bethesda” proved that when the Bethesda community comes together, meaningful change is always within reach. After all, it’s not just about hitting the mark—it’s about making a difference, one swing at a time.



BETHESDA HEALTH GROUP FOUNDATION PRESENTS

BIRDIES FOR BETHESDA

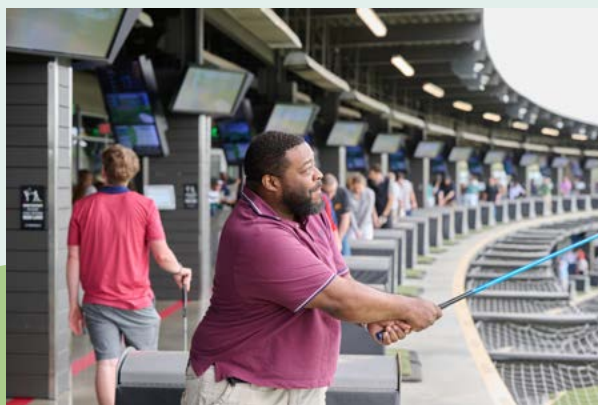


We are so grateful for Midwest Elevator—Title Sponsor for all three years of “Birdies for Bethesda!”



A special thank-you to CCL Hospitality—a Title Sponsor of the 2025 “Birdies for Bethesda” Golf Tournament.

Scan this code to see more photos from the event.



Tim Granger from CCL Hospitality admires his shot during the 2025 “Birdies for Bethesda” event.



*The team from Just Commercial Kitchens decides to have a little fun with **Claire Luna**, Bethesda Foundation Development Coordinator, during their team photo.*

Spreading Love, One Card at a Time

In the rehab dining room at Bethesda Southgate, excitement crackled in the air—like the lively tunes you hear on your favorite radio station. Residents couldn't help but smile as a cheerful crew from Y98, one of St. Louis's favorite stations, and VOYCE, a nonprofit dedicated to supporting older adults, walked through the door. Dressed in festive shades of pink and red, the volunteers arrived carrying boxes overflowing with handmade Valentine's Day cards.

Each card, lovingly crafted by students from 27 local schools, served as a heartfelt reminder that someone was thinking of them. As classic love songs played softly in the background, the Y98 team moved from table to table, handing out cards and chatting with residents.

Bethesda Southgate resident **Robin Simmons** beams as she flips through her stack of valentines.

"This was such a sweet surprise," Robin says.

Nearby, fellow resident **Pam Crader** gently runs her fingers over a sparkly heart glued to one of her cards.

"Knowing these students took the time to make this and that the team delivered them to us means so much," Pam says.

The idea for this project began last year with Y98 morning show host Bret Mega, who was inspired by his own mother's experience in a senior care community. He wanted to bring joy to older adults who might feel alone on holidays and saw Valentine's Day as the perfect opportunity. Reaching out to schools, Bret asked students to create handmade cards. What started as a small gesture quickly blossomed into something much bigger.

"It's truly amazing," Bret says. "Kids get to express their creativity, and seniors feel remembered. Love connects us all—whether you're a child making the card or a senior receiving one."

Participation nearly doubled this year, as students from preschool to high school joined in. Some schools even hosted parades and assemblies to celebrate their contributions before handing over the cards.

"It's astounding how many people are involved," Y98's Hannah Gibbs grins. "Something so simple reaches so far."

This year, 50 care facilities received valentines, and the initiative is already expanding.

"Other stations are adopting the idea," Y98's Kevin Berghoff says. "We want to grow this so even more seniors feel the love."



Look at the smiles on the faces of the Bethesda Southgate residents when they received the holiday cards from Bret Mega (top photo) and his team members from Y98!

VOYCE, a longtime advocate for older adults and a key partner in the project, helped distribute the cards, with Bethesda Southgate specially chosen to receive them.

"After our Project Holiday Cheer initiative with Y98 concluded, continuing with Valentine's Day was a natural next step," VOYCE Development Coordinator Melody Fox says. "We're eager to spread more joy on more holidays."

It was a beautiful day, a perfect blend of warmth, music and heartfelt giving. The cards did exactly what they were meant to do—remind each resident that they are deeply loved.

Getting Ready for Spring

With paintbrushes in hand and creativity in full bloom, residents at Bethesda Gardens have been welcoming the spirit of spring long before it officially arrived.

Here, **Marilyn Nennert** and **Steve Kuzicka** didn't let a chilly March morning dampen their enthusiasm. Instead, they worked diligently, painting a decorative turtle and birdhouse—one of the many Steve has painted—that will beautify the South Garden and patio area at Bethesda Gardens with many other projects.



Bethesda Present at Senior Fairs

Ashley Nelson (left), Sales Counselor at Bethesda Terrace, and **Lea Ann Coates**, Residency Counselor at Bethesda Hawthorne Place and Assisted Living at Charless Village, await the attendees at the “Aging in Place/Aging with Grace!” senior fair.

This event is one of many where Bethesda staff connect with seniors and their families to share information about our communities and services and answer questions.



Hospice Care Visits KMOX Radio

As mentioned in the Winter 2025 edition of *The Pulse*, KMOX radio personality and Bethesda Hospice Care volunteer **Dave Glover** is dedicated to educating about hospice care,

particularly the “No One Dies Alone” program.

In March, Dave interviewed **Chrissy Mendez**, RN Case Manager (left), and **Melissa Helmkamp**, Volunteer Coordinator, to discuss the program and explain how others can get involved—just as Dave did.



Honoring Our Heroes

The annual National Vietnam War Veterans Day breakfast took place at Soldiers Memorial on March 29. The event featured a screening of the documentary “My Vietnam, Your Iraq,” followed by a Q&A with the film’s director and Vietnam veteran, Ron Osgood.

As part of Bethesda Hospice Care’s “We Honor Veterans” program, a contingent of Veterans from Bethesda and their loved ones attended the breakfast, which commemorated the sacrifices of those who served. Pictured front row, from left: **John Dotson**, **Nick Ohlman** and **Gene Rankin** (all veterans). Back row, from left: Volunteer Coordinator **Melissa Helmkamp**, **Rod Raugh** (veteran), **Dawn Stumpe**, **Kathy Ohlman** and **Julie Strassman**, Manager of Support Services.



Did You Know...

... that our Activities staff regularly shares fun and engaging photos on our community Facebook pages?

... in just the past few months, Village North residents have enjoyed outings to local plays, an Opening Day baseball celebration and a quick ice cream trip to Dairy Queen—and that's a list from just one community! Many other Bethesda communities are joining in the fun, too.

To see the latest photos, visit the Bethesda website (www.BethesdaHealth.org), navigate to the community of your choice, or scan the QR code below. Enjoy!



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Two Communities Earn “Best of North County”

Congratulations to the staff and residents at both Village North Retirement Community and Christian Extended Care & Rehabilitation (CECR), each recognized with first-place honors in the 2025 ‘Best of North County’ contest!

Village North was voted “Best Retirement Community” by the readers of *Community News*, and CECR was voted “Best Skilled Nursing.” This marks the third consecutive year both communities have received recognition in these categories.

Kelley Wright, Sales Manager of the Westplex Media Group (which includes *Community News*), was on hand to celebrate with the winners!



Top photo—Village North Retirement Community team members celebrate being named “Best Retirement Community.”



Lower photo—Christian Extended Care & Rehabilitation staff gathers after earning “Best Skilled Nursing” honors.