

Pulse

A publication of Bethesda Health Group, Inc. • Winter 2026

Fostering successful aging through
compassion and innovation

Life in Motion



Meier Elected as 2026 Bethesda Board Chair

J. Dale Meier, retired Managing Partner of Grant Cooper Executive Search and a Bethesda Board member since 2019, has been elected Chair of Bethesda's Board of Directors for 2026.

Dale served as Vice Chair in 2023 and 2024 before assuming the role of Board Chair. He succeeds **Jackie Yoon**, who served as Board Chair from 2023-2025.

"Since joining the Board, Dale has exhibited a relentless desire to do what is necessary to serve our senior population," says **Joe Brinker**, President & CEO. "That, coupled with his leadership skills and commitment to Bethesda, makes him an excellent fit to serve as Board Chair."

In addition, **Patrick Rooney**, **Kevin Klingler** and **Philip Hutchison** have been elected as Executive



J. Dale Meier



Jackie Yoon



Patrick Rooney

"Since joining the Board, Dale has exhibited a relentless desire to do what is necessary to serve our senior population."

Joe Brinker, President & CEO

Committee members, serving as Vice Chair, Treasurer and Secretary, respectively. This is Pat's first year as an Executive Committee member, while Kevin and Phil resume the positions they held in 2025.

In addition to Dale, Pat, Joe, Kevin and Phil, the 2026 Bethesda Board comprises **Jim Esther, M.D.**; **Fred Falker**; **Mike Keller**; **Gary Mayes**; **Veronica McDonnell**; **John Rowe** and **Samantha Teibel**.

Bethesda Board Leadership

Board of Directors

J. Dale Meier
Chair

Patrick J. Rooney
Vice Chair

Joseph J. Brinker
President and CEO

Kevin J. Klingler*
Treasurer

Philip A. Hutchison
Secretary

James H. Esther, M.D.
Fred G. Falker
J. Michael Keller
Gary L. Mayes
Veronica McDonnell
John W. Rowe*
Samantha J. Teibel

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Peter B. Krombach
Sally Lilly
Susan G. Moore
Fred H. Perabo
Alphonse D. Poelker
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Stephen W. Woodard
Jackie Yoon*

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Laura Frame
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Diane Grooms
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Mary Jo Walker
Carrie Wetzel
Gloria Wotka
Jackie Yoon*
Lisa Zoia

*Former Board Chair

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



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Cycling, Friendship and Defying Age at Bethesda Gardens

At Bethesda Gardens, it's not unusual to see **Fred Biere**, 89, and **Steve Ruzicka**, 75, clipping on their helmets and rolling out for another ride. Both men are avid cyclists and log impressive mileage—often approaching 100 miles weekly between their solo rides and shared outings on local venues such as Grant's Trail.

Their commitment to staying active is remarkable, but what stands out most is how their riding has blossomed into an easy, lasting friendship.

Fred has been cycling since his early 20s, keeping the sport at the center of his life for more than six decades. He has covered hundreds of miles on long-distance charity rides and thousands more around scenic settings like Mackinac Island.

"It's unlimited where you can ride," he says.

Steve's love of cycling began in his 40s, after years of competitive tennis and soccer took a toll on his knees. He made up for lost time, riding along beaches in San Diego, across Catalina Island and throughout the St. Louis area.

When Steve moved to Bethesda Gardens, he quickly gained a reputation for his love of cycling. So, when Fred arrived, the staff recognized a shared passion and connected the two.

"We eventually met up and started to ride together," Fred says.

Now, the pair hits up Grant's Trail nearly every week. Some of their rides together are planned; others happen more spontaneously. Either way, the outings have given them the time to strike up a friendship.

"When we get to a stop, we'll sit on a bench and just chat," Steve says.

Whether they talk about cycling or reminisce about their younger days, Fred is thankful for the friendship.

"It's really just about companionship and sharing your hobby with somebody you know," he says.

For both men, the benefits of cycling go well beyond exercise.

"When you're driving a car, you see things too quickly," Steve says. "On a bike, you get to enjoy the amazing scenery at a slower pace."

They've spotted plenty of deer along the trail, and have even seen the Budweiser Clydesdales at Grant's Farm.

"When you're quiet on your bike, wildlife doesn't pay attention to you, which leads to seeing some pretty neat things," Fred shares.

While each completed intense rides earlier in life, today they enjoy

a more balanced pace with the help of e-bikes. Steve often rides the first half of a trip without the electric boost and uses it on the return. Fred appreciates the extra help on hills while still enjoying a solid workout.

They're grateful for Bethesda Gardens' easy access to some of the area's best trails. Residents sometimes react with surprise when they see the pair head out in full cycling gear.

"I think I sometimes shock people," Steve says. "They'll see me in my helmet, and I've got my cycling clothes on, and they'll look really surprised."

"You don't always expect to see this in a retirement community," Fred adds with a smile. "But I enjoy getting the regular exercise, and I've been doing it such a long time, I can't stop now!"



Fred Biere (left) and **Steve Ruzicka** have been riding for 60+ and 30+ years, respectively.

St. Louis Arc Selects Bethesda Southgate for Award

In recognition of its 75th anniversary, St. Louis Arc, an organization that empowers people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to lead better lives, chose only 75 of its Community Partners to receive a special award for going “above and beyond” while working with their clients.

Only one recipient was in the senior care and services industry. And that was Bethesda Southgate.

“We were thrilled to honor Bethesda Southgate, which has been a long-term partner of ours,” says **Megan Favazza**, Vice President of Adult Day and Employment Services at St. Louis Arc.

The most recent St. Louis Arc client to work at Bethesda Southgate was **Nathan**, who worked primarily with the laundry team.



“It was a great learning experience for our team,” says **Shaun Heidke**, Housekeeping Manager at Bethesda Southgate. “They were very patient with Nathan and provided plenty of coaching to keep him on the right path. It’s a great relationship that I hope continues.”

*Bethesda Southgate team members **Nicole Carter** (far left), **Shaun Heidke** and **Chris Reynolds** (far right) celebrate with the St. Louis Arc “Celebration Squad” (**Megan Favazza** and **Dominic Casola**).*

Thank You, Spellman Brady!

For the fifth consecutive year, the staff from Spellman Brady, an interior design firm that has been designing Bethesda’s communities for more than 20 years, held a planting party at Bethesda Hawthorne Place and helped more than a dozen residents create beautiful potted plant arrangements.

Here, Spellman Brady’s **Laura Kreher** oversees resident **John Fischer** as he waters his new plant.



Thank You to Our Veterans!

Bethesda’s communities and services are filled with residents, patients and staff who are Veterans, and every year ceremonies on Veterans Day are held to recognize and honor them and their spouses for their service to our country.

Here, some of the Veteran residents living at Bethesda Terrace gather and salute in recognition of their service.

Bethesda Unveils New Training Specialist Program

After three years of planning, Bethesda has launched a new Training Specialist program designed to increase employee retention, strengthen performance and ultimately enhance the patient experience.

“The program was created to support all of our new hires throughout their training,” says **Michele Kimball**, Corporate Director of Clinical Services. “We have a few similar programs in place already, but we really wanted to create one strong, consolidated program.”

Bethesda Southgate is the first community to implement the program, with plans to expand across all Bethesda communities. Six candidates were selected for this first program, based on their record of excellence. The inaugural group includes four Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs), one Registered Nurse (RN) and one Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN).

“Ideal Training Specialist candidates are the ones that always go the extra mile or raise their hands when volunteers are needed,” says **Jennifer Popp**, Vice President of Skilled Nursing. “Now we get to recognize them with a title while they do what they’ve already been doing.”

The participants completed an intensive eight-hour training course that focused on key quality measures, including customer service, conflict resolution, wounds, falls and infection control. As certified Training Specialists, they will be paired with first-year employees, serving as dedicated mentors to guide training and regularly review performance.

“It was important that this program wasn’t just an ‘orientation checklist,’” says Michele. “We



*Congratulations to the new Training Specialists! Standing (l-r): **Andrea Taylor, RN**, Staff Development; **Amanda Melton, CNA**; **Robbin Geringer, CNA**; **Jennifer Chitwood, RN**, Staff Development. Sitting (l-r): **Chelo Maningo, RN**; **Sharon Jordan, CNA**; **Gwen Lewis, CNA**; **Dee Huskey, LPN**; **Sara Zajac, RN**, Staff Development.*

wanted to build champions within our organization that could be a constant and consistent resource.”

Robbin Geringer, CNA, is one of the six selected for the program. For her, becoming a Training Specialist was the perfect chance to advance in her career while maintaining the role she loves.

“I like being a CNA; I like my shift, my hours and the interactions I have with the patients,” Robbin says. “This was a great opportunity to advance my career in my own way.”

The success of the program will be measured by analyzing employee evaluations and the impact it has on staff retention, turnover rates and several other key metrics.

Robbin’s vision of success, however, looks different than data.

“I think it’s really all about teamwork. Now I’ll be able to check in on new hires and talk with them if something’s not working to say ‘okay, let’s figure this out.’ And I hope that means people will stay longer,” she says.

“I like being a CNA; I like my shift, my hours and the interactions I have with the patients. This was a great opportunity to advance in my career in my own way.”

Robbin Geringer, CNA

After implementing the program across nursing, Bethesda hopes to provide similar programs in other departments.

As with every initiative at Bethesda, it is designed to ultimately improve the care patients receive.

“With our Training Specialists, new hires will receive ongoing support and mentorship that extends beyond orientation,” says **Sara Zajac**, Senior Staff Development Coordinator, who led the training session at Bethesda Southgate.

“These relationships promote teamwork, knowledge-sharing and quality of care.”

Bethesda Terrace Staff “Saves Christmas” at Holiday Party

Bethesda Terrace’s annual staff holiday party took on an interesting twist this year. Decked out in Christmas pajamas, Santa hats and holiday accessories, employees ventured into an empty apartment for a holiday-themed escape room.

“In previous years, we’ve done more traditional games like Minute to Win It and Rob Your Neighbor,” says **Andrea Tripp**, Vice President and Senior General Manager. “This year, we really wanted to do something creative and interactive to thank the team for a wonderful year.”

After enjoying a catered lunch, the staff was separated into three separate groups, and one by one received their mission.

The scene: It’s Christmas Eve and a strong gust of wind has blown away Santa’s magic reindeer dust. Without it, the reindeer cannot fly, and Christmas around the world is in jeopardy. All hope rests on a market that sells the very dust needed to save Christmas—but the owner has already left for the night, locking the supplies inside. It was up to the team to search the market and uncover the magic dust.

Each group worked through riddles, clues and hints to find hidden keys, crack codes and unlock boxes—all with just 20 minutes on the clock.

In group 1, Office Coordinator **Casey Gerhard** stepped up to lead.

“In the beginning, everyone kind of went off in their own little areas to solve things,” she says. “Eventually I kind of took over, and once we started to work together, things really got moving.”

As the clock ticked down, they found themselves stuck on the final locked box that held the reindeer



dust. Despite their best efforts, time ran out before they could crack the last clue.

Group 2 entered the room with similar optimism but were left to the same unfortunate ending.

Group 3, however, was determined not to meet the same fate. With 2 minutes and 30 seconds remaining on the clock, they unlocked the final box and claimed victory.

“It was so fun to work together with coworkers from different departments that you wouldn’t normally interact with on the day-

to-day,” says **Ashley Nelson**, Senior Sales Counselor, who was a group 3 participant. “We had a lot of different mindsets and skills in that room, and when one of us got stumped, another would step up to offer a different perspective.”

“I really enjoyed this year’s party,” Casey says. “It was my first ‘escape room’ experience, and I thought it was so fun. Hopefully we’ll do it again next year.”

“I’m so glad I had the chance to participate,” Ashley adds. “I’ll always remember it because it was so creative and full of great memories.”

Happy Holidays from Bethesda!

To see more photos, please scan this QR code and access all our Facebook pages.



1 At Bethesda Dilworth, Administrator **Renee Cwiklowski** and Resident Services Director **Jeri Wright** help Santa with his toy distribution—at 3 a.m. on Christmas Day!



2 Everyone has a good time when they hang out with Santa at the annual Bethesda Southgate Holiday Lights event!



3 **Luan Lehr** concentrates as she plays “Cotton Ball Scoop” at the Assisted Living at Charless Village holiday party.

4 Happy New Year from **Tracy Wynkoop** at Village North!

5 Keeping the annual tradition alive, the Corporate office team collected gifts for a family in need.

6 Sorry, **Genie Thoma**, we’re not so sure that’s a resolution that we all agree with!



Did You Know...

... that Bethesda has once again qualified to be a category finalist in the annual Best Places to Work contest, coordinated by Quantum Workplace and the St. Louis Business Journal? More information will be available in the Spring edition of the *Pulse*.

... that our Activities and Life Enrichment staff members regularly share fun and engaging content on our community Facebook pages? To see the latest photos and videos, scan the QR code and click on the community of your choice. And for those who are active on TikTok—you must check out the entertaining content on the Bethesda Terrace and Village North accounts!



BETHESDA

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Registration Open for “Birdies for Bethesda”

Mark your calendars for the 4th Annual Birdies for Bethesda Golf Tournament on April 13 at Topgolf Chesterfield. If you are planning to participate, time is of the essence. **Linda Sanders**, Corporate V.P. and Director of Development, says she anticipates another sellout.

Birdies for Bethesda has quickly become Bethesda’s biggest fundraiser, supporting essential programs that underscore Bethesda’s unwavering mission to dignified aging and compassionate community care. The Bethesda Health Group Foundation hopes to surpass last year’s milestone of \$200,000 raised to support residents in need.

“Once someone becomes part of the Bethesda community, we stand by the principle of caring for them throughout their aging journey,” Linda says. “Whether an individual has outlived their financial resources or needs assistance in their home, the Bethesda Foundation is dedicated to providing that support—and Birdies for Bethesda helps make it possible.”

Midwest Elevator and CCL Hospitality Group are returning as this year’s Title Sponsors—an incredible



show of support from two community-minded corporate partners.

Breaking away from traditional golf tournaments, Birdies for Bethesda welcomes participants of all skill levels.

“You don’t have to be good at golf to participate,” Linda adds. “Our golfers love that the event starts later in the afternoon and takes place in a climate-controlled environment, rather than spending a full day on a course at the mercy of Mother Nature.”

The event will again feature a silent auction, including the popular “Booze Wagon” raffle.

For questions, contact **Claire Luna** at 314-800-1916 or celuna@bethesdahealth.org.

To register your team or become a sponsor, scan the QR Code.

