

# suburbanlife

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pg. 58

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# Finding Joy in Retirement

**Arbour Square of Harleysville** redefines the concept of senior living with concierge services, a variety of enjoyable activities, and a fulfilling lifestyle for residents 55 and older.

**A**s a former longtime executive for two of the world's best-known hotel brands, David Arena knows a thing or two about the hospitality industry. He had never considered a career in the senior living space before four years ago, when he was recruited to utilize his experience and expertise in a different way. Ever since, as the executive director of Arbour Square of Harleysville, he has been helping to transform what retirement can look like in the 21st century.

Unlike the retirement communities of the past that had more of a clinical or detached feel, today's senior living communities strive to offer a vibrant, stress-free lifestyle that inspires socialization and participation in a wide range of activities. With Arena at the helm, Arbour Square has been at the forefront of the movement, giving its residents a sense of purpose, a voice, and multiple paths to fulfillment.

"It's an amazing environment here," Arena says. "The residents are very close and it is a community in the larger sense. Whenever we give someone a tour, they always comment to me about how nice the residents are and how happy they are. To me, there couldn't be a better compliment."

Situated on 22 acres on a serene campus in Montgomery County, Arbour Square is part of True Connection Communities and provides an all-inclusive experience, from

dining to housekeeping, for those 55 years old and above. It has a variety of floor plans, ranging from studios to one- and two-bedroom apartments.

Arbour Square is currently home to 300 residents, the fullest it has ever been. Arena credits the community's growth to how easy it is for seniors to find pastimes they love.

"I think what makes us unique is the type of activities and events that we do here daily," he says. "The board is always full and includes everything from crafts to taking residents offsite to restaurants or the theater. We have fitness classes, we have educational classes. Anything you could ask for, we provide."

The long list includes live entertainment,

woodworking classes, billiards, bocce, and shuffleboard. The "wellness floor," as Arena calls it, has a fitness center, a massage suite, a medical office, and an area for physical and occupational therapy. Arbour Square also has a popular pub with a complimentary happy hour and even a casino with slot machines, a roulette wheel, and tables for blackjack and poker.

What's more, residents also have a say in the development of new programs.

"We delve into people's lives and ask, 'What was your career? What are your hobbies?'" Arena adds. "We've been able to initiate residents running their own activities, such as a quilting class, writing classes, spiritual classes, a billiards class. We have 14 resident-run programs currently, and I really think that's made a difference in the lifestyle here, because it's easier for the residents to learn from a peer than someone else."

The community's resident-run thrift store, called Second Chance on Main, generates close to \$30,000 a year. The proceeds benefit local EMT, fire, and police organizations, as well as food-insecure families.

A move-in ambassador helps new residents get acclimated to Arbour Square, to find activities they enjoy and to meet friends who share their interests. Arena cites a shy woman who recently moved in but was asked to join a billiards class. Despite having never picked up a pool cue before, she has





Arbour Square's many amenities include a fitness center, a popular pub with a complimentary happy hour and games of chance, and an art gallery showcasing original work.

become something of a pool whiz.

"Socialization is extremely important," he says. "People are nervous because they've lived in their houses for 30, 40, or 50 years and might have neighbors they like, but coming here, you're in a much closer environment. It's daunting at first, but coming down to the restaurant and sitting with people you don't know, you tend to make friends very quickly, and they become lifelong friends. They'll drag you out of your apartment if they feel you need to see something or attend something. They take care of one another."

Events often feature singers or dancers, though they can also be informational, built around topics such as insurance, fire safety, or healthy eating. Pennsylvania State Representative Donna Scheuren is a frequent guest speaker; she even helped one resident, a veteran, regain 15 years of back benefits to which he was entitled.

Dining represents one of the most crucial aspects of a senior living community, and Arbour Square offers chef-prepared meals that are as nutritious as they are tasty. Residents' families can come and enjoy a meal at the restaurant, too, and are regularly invited to special events like the recent Veterans' Day Luncheon or the upcoming Brunch with Santa.

"There are some people who tend to stick to their residences for meals, and that's fine," Arena says. "But the three meals a day are very important to most residents and they look forward to dining together. They get a menu each week and they decide what they want to get well in advance. We recently switched to restaurant-style service, and the products coming out are hot, delicious, and well presented."

Other unique aspects of Arbour Square include an art gallery that showcases original work from a resident-taught painting class,



along with quilting, needlework, knitting, drawing, and photography; Grandkids' Corner, a space with crafts, toys, candy for visiting youngsters; bread-and-breakfast-style accommodations, made from two converted apartments, for residents' loved ones who may live far away and need a place to overnight.

As comprehensive as Arbour Square's offerings may be, Arena meets regularly with residents to hear their suggestions. That's how the community's latest project—an outdoor putting green—came to be.

"It really is about giving them a voice," he says. "They feel like they are part-owners, and they should—this is their home. They want to be proud of where they live."

Arena has adapted well to his leadership role and takes pride in his efforts to elevate the community at Arbour Square. In his eyes, though, he's just following the example of the entire staff, many of whom have been part of the team for 10 years or longer.

"I think that [consistency among staff] contributes a lot and gives the residents a sense of security and safety, and there's a lot of education that comes from these people as well," he



says. "They're here because they want to be, not because they're just collecting a paycheck, and we make sure that's the case. ... It's too important. We have to show empathy and compassion, and that's what we're all about. Residents become like family." ■

## Arbour Square of Harleysville

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