

Aging Services Launches Member Communications Tool

The feature in the January 2010 edition of *agenda* outlined our new communications strategy for the coming year, including the launch of a series of listservs – or forums, as we have taken to calling them. The fundamental premise behind these forums is to create an opportunity for professional exchange, networking and idea generation exclusively for members of Aging Services of California. This new member benefit is intended to make it easier for you to solicit feedback from your peers, obtain timely information and stay connected with your association – all without ever having to leave your office.

We also designed the forums as a way for you to customize your member experience, enabling you to select the networking and information exchange best suited to your needs. To that end, we created 14 different forums, with some specific to member types and others tailored to professional staff. A description can be found at www.aging.org. To get the process started, Aging Services staff has made forum assignments based on member type. If you work at a CCRC, for example, you'll be able to post to the Residential Care Forum – and you'll receive a daily digest of messages posted by others in the forum. Members are free at all times to sign up for additional forums and to change their settings regarding how and when they receive messages.

All of the forums were scheduled to be available to members before the beginning of February, so you should already have received your first message. In addition to welcoming you, this message describes the steps you can take to more fully participate in the forums. If you haven't received a welcome message by the end of the February, it's likely that we don't have a valid e-mail address for you. Please send an e-mail to membership@aging.org and request to have your contact information updated; be sure to include your full name, your title and the name of your community.

Hospitality: A Key to Culture Change ... Even in Hard Times

Is there something in the meaning of hospitality that can help create a transformative approach to older adult living? Seniority Inc., a consulting and management services firm for retirement communities, recently published a white paper addressing this question. According to the report, in the 1980s, older adult communities started emphasizing hotel-like services and amenities – a trend that accelerated when hoteliers Marriott and Hyatt entered the business. Both companies trumpeted their hospitality background as a distinct advantage in attracting residents.

Despite the trend, the white paper notes, leaders in the field of retirement housing and services have not yet fully explored the meaning of hospitality. In the narrowest sense, hospitality for retirement communities is about mimicking the practices that make high-end hotels so pleasurable for guests. In the larger sense, hospitality means creating a shared vision of service that satisfies both residents and employees.

The Seniority Inc. report suggests that the concept of hospitality thus offers the possibility of true culture change, but it requires much more than simply pampering residents with resort-style services. Indeed, a recent survey of luxury hotel guests found that they want to be excited and inspired rather than pampered. Drawing on this observation, the white paper argues that an exceptional experience for residents of older adult communities is not contingent on offering an upscale product; the exceptional experience can occur amid simplicity.

Conventional thinking has long held that consumers will pay for upscale services – but the recession has called that assumption into question. In fact, researchers are now forecasting the emergence of a post-recession consumer who is cost conscious and debt averse, yet still interested in having high-quality, meaningful experiences. The white paper notes that by emphasizing meaning and inspiration more than superficial luxury, communities for older adults can offer genuine hospitality to post-recession residents looking for living options that respond to their needs and desires.

Inspired by these findings, Seniority Inc. has launched a new initiative for culture change through hospitality. To learn more or to request a copy of the white paper, contact Sloan Bentley, president of Seniority Inc., at sbentley@seniorityinc.com or 925-924-7158. The firm, which has consulting expertise in all areas of older adult living, is owned by American Baptist Homes of the West and is an Aging Services of California approved vendor.