

NIC INSIDER

Newsletter

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Spreading the Good Word on Senior Housing

by Cameron Bell, Vice President Portfolio Management,
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Cameron Bell

The senior living and long-term care industry is exceptional. Those outside the industry typically do not grasp or fully appreciate what occurs inside these communities—these residents' homes. Therefore, those within the industry are responsible for sharing the positivity of what is accomplished. If it is not us, who? If not now, when? Unfortunately, terrible things do sometimes happen in this industry, but what sector is immune?

Over the course of my tenure at NHI, I have visited every building in our portfolio (and then some). Despite all the challenges, those recent and even before the obvious one, I have seen and interacted with extraordinary people. As I grinded during the toughest months of the pandemic, I could always lean into or think of those I've met who were dealing with so much. If they were not giving up, how dare I? That gave me strength to persevere. As I thought on an article to write for the NIC Insider, I could not have chosen a more opportune time than this to share some stories from a few remarkable people I've had the pleasure of encountering or working with. There are countless more, but I hope what you read below is encouraging and uplifting; that it reminds you not only of why you do what you do but also challenges you to reflect on your personal experiences, and to spread the good word on senior housing, particularly for the future workforce!

I trust you will enjoy, presented in the order of when I met each individual, the stories and perspectives of Justin Hutchens (Executive Vice President, Senior Housing, Ventas, Inc.), Andy Eby (Caregiver/Owner, Bickford Senior Living), Sara Mitchell (Vice President, Partner Relations, Solinity), Blair Quasnitschka (Vice President of Operations, Maxwell Group, Inc.), and Holly Ballarotto (Chief of Staff, Brandywine Living).

Why or how did you enter the long-term care industry?

Hutchens: I started as a caregiver working at an intermediate care facility when I was in college. I really enjoyed the job and working environment. I decided to pursue a management career in long-term care, as I was drawn to the altruistic nature and importance of the profession. I learned early on that no two days are alike. The challenges and opportunities seem endless at times, which can make for an exhilarating career.

Eby: I have heard it said that people who are the most alive and fulfilled are those who seek to live a life in service to something greater than themselves. I can say that this has been true with me. The pursuit of a meaningful life led me to leave a promising NFL career to join this industry. When I made this decision, everyone said I would regret it. They couldn't have been more wrong. Not only have I lived a more fulfilling life, I have awakened to who I am at my core and the contribution I am here to make.

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Mitchell: Six years ago, I was looking to transition out of journalism, where my routine was dictated by breaking news, the next sports game, and countless hours of travel to and from games. I certainly enjoyed being a sideline reporter with SEC-ESPN and later an anchor for a CBS affiliate, but I was missing purpose in my work. I first learned of the industry when I was invited to participate as a media relations volunteer for an endurance cycling event that was raising funds for Alzheimer's research. I accepted and my career trajectory changed on that 12-day, 1,000+ mile cycling event that later became Pedal for Alzheimer's, Ltd. That opened up conversations with the founder of Solinity, Josh Crisp, who included me in the launch of the new brand. I joined as Director of Communications, and over the next few years, our team, influence, and portfolio has grown.

Quasnitschka: Senior living is a second career for me, but with groundwork laid by my father who served seniors for 20+ years as a nursing home administrator. My brother and I often went to work with him when we were young, helping out in recreation or maintenance, and developed a comfortability and appreciation for seniors early on. My college studies guided me towards the sports industry, and while working for the PGA in Virginia, I had decided to move back to Connecticut with no real professional plan. I was having the "what do you want to do with your life" discussion with my mother, and for no apparent reason, I blurted out "maybe I should get into what dad used to do..." (he had passed at the age of 49). After making the decision to pursue management in senior living, many industry peers of my father suggested I seek out an administrator named Jim Malloy – Jim was a college fraternity brother of my father who started him on the path to nursing home administration when my father came back from the Vietnam War. I wound up doing my Administrator in Training hours with Jim just as my father had done 35 years before! Looking back, I recall an interaction I had with a complete stranger at my father's funeral, and it puts into perspective the amazing influence he had on me and the ability we have to impact those we serve in the industry. His comment to me was: "You do not know me, but I knew your father for 15 minutes in the space of time when he cared for my mother – you should feel fortunate you had him for 15 years, he was that special."

Ballarotto: I started my career in hospitality and always intended to stay in that industry. But, after a chance meeting with Brandywine's leadership at a conference, Brenda Bacon, Brandywine's co-founder, opened my eyes to the senior living industry. Almost nine years later, I cannot imagine working in another field. That experience has made me passionate about increasing industry visibility to the next generation of our industry's future leaders.

What motivates you to keep going as the industry faces numerous challenges?

Hutchens: I've spent my career on the operating side and on the real estate capital side of the business focused in the U.S., U.K., and Canada. I really enjoy interacting with the best and brightest leaders of senior housing companies, and my colleagues at Ventas all working together to navigate the macro environment, create a value proposition attractive to seniors, and provide peace of mind to their loved ones. There are always challenges; however, this is a battle-tested resilient sector with very strong net demand prospects moving forward.

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Eby: Motivation is important for those who are working typical jobs or building typical careers. Those who feel called to this work, operate from a higher, more sustainable energy. Adversity, setbacks, and failures are table stakes, just part of the game. The glory consists not so much in winning, but in playing a poor hand well. Those of us in the long-term care industry do this work because we love it. It is an honor to be the caregiver who is willing to do whatever it takes for our residents' happiness.

Mitchell: The people. The industry has an amazing group of passionate people who bring me energy. Conversations inspire and motivate me to continue bringing my best to help better teams and organizations that we serve. As a senior living marketing agency, it's my responsibility to push the envelope with new and improved marketing and advertising ideas and strategies. It is exciting and motivating to hear the stories, passions, and ideas of the people in this great industry.

Quasnitschka: My motivation is the excitement I get to lead and connect with others. As any business, there is a bottom line to meet, but that bottom line is not sustainable without connection and relationships rooted in empathy and respect. As difficult as the industry is, quality leadership and developing tomorrow's leaders is critical; I'm driven to contribute to that.

Ballarotto: It's easy to get caught up in the day-to-day challenges of operating senior living communities. But if you step foot into any of our communities, you see the true heroes working there and the lives they touch every day. Knowing that our team's work changes people's lives is incredibly motivating.

What are you excited about as you think about the future of senior housing/long-term care?

Hutchens: I am most excited about the forward-looking supply/demand fundamentals. The underlying demand is growing at a pace we have not seen before. The opportunity for net absorption in the senior housing sector is supportive of recapturing the financial losses suffered during the pandemic. There is also tremendous room for innovation, through the use of consumer facing and operational technological advances and lifestyle offerings will evolve as we start to serve the baby boomer generation. Exciting times ahead, indeed.

Eby: Without question, the last two years have been tough. We have gone through a crisis of epic proportions unlike anything we've ever seen or could possibly imagine. But I am grateful that we've experienced these challenging times, because I can see and feel something new and better emerging. I believe we have the opportunity to create a movement that radically recasts a vision for how we care for America's seniors. This will require us to un-learn senior care as we know it so that we create space for a new, more transformative model. I feel the energy of my peers ready to champion the change our seniors deserve.

Mitchell: I'm most excited about the new and innovative ways that we'll deliver information to future residents. The industry is designing and building communities for the future resident, and I'm excited to see how we will also match the online marketing for how the resident wants to discover the



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information. I think this will be a heavy emphasis on digital marketing (website, email, social media) and communication with consumers will move towards a focus on the way they want to receive information (text messages or email over a phone call). I'm excited to push existing communities, and new brands too, to a new virtual, digital, custom delivery of marketing and messaging.

Quasnitschka: The evolution of senior living excites me. This will never be a stagnant landscape to operate in. People will always age, and there will be evolving expectations, technology, culture, living options, and workforce trends. Couple that with the upcoming generation influx (baby boomers and beyond), our commitment to serve will be needed more than ever.

Ballarotto: As our product has become more visible and accepted, our customer has also become much more discerning. We've seen a flight to quality. There is an excellent opportunity to return to pre-pandemic operating margins and beyond by winning market share, attracting and retaining top talent, and carefully managing the impact of rising inflation without degrading quality or service. No one said it would be easy; nothing worth doing ever is.



The graphic features a blue-tinted background image of a man in a suit looking at a laptop. In the top left corner, there is a logo consisting of a grid of squares next to the letters 'NIC'. Below the logo, the text reads '2022 Skilled Nursing BOOT CAMP'. In the center, the text 'EVALUATING THE INVESTMENT LANDSCAPE' is displayed above 'VIRTUAL | May 5, 2022'. At the bottom, a green button with white text says 'REGISTER NOW'.

Senior Housing & Care Industry Calendar for April 2022

4/2-4/5/2022	Environments for Aging (Milwaukee, WI)
4/3-4/6/2022	19th Annual World Health Care Congress (Washington, D.C.)
4/4-4/5/2022	2022 Health Datapalooza and National Health Policy Conference (Arlington, VA)
4/5-4/14/2022	Senior Living Foresight Evolve 2022 (Virtual)
4/6/2022	Pennsylvania Assisted Living Association Spring Conference (Lancaster, PA)
4/6-4/7/2022	Home Health Care News BRAIN Summit (Virtual)
4/14/2022	Convergence Dialogue on Reimagining Care for Older Adults (Virtual)
4/19-4/21/2022	Spring ULI Senior Housing Council (San Diego, CA)
4/20-4/22/2022	Synergy Senior Dining & Hospitality Conference (Orlando, FL)
4/21/2022	Spring ULI Lifestyle Residential Development Council (LRDC) (San Diego, CA)
4/25-4/27/2022	AHCA/NCAL Arkansas Health Care Association Spring Conference & Trade Show (Hot Springs, AR)
4/29/2022	Aging 2.0 Boston – Age Friendly “Revolutionize” 2022 Conference (Boston, MA)

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