

Cutting edge technology a necessity for senior living communities

By JIM BARG

As technology keeps moving ever forward, its impact on industries grows. In the world of long-term care, having the ability to update and adapt on the fly is vital, especially in an industry where empathy is required to deal with daily challenges.

For Eileen Ryan-Maruke, St. Ann's vice president of marketing and community relations, being up to date on the latest technology means making things easier for everyone, such as re-implementing the use of artificial intelligence (AI) on the St. Ann's website, establishing 'AI Ann' this past August.

"Ann is an AI that I chose [to use] again after doing some research," she said. "We were already using a system called Snapengage, and after investigating, we decided to try their AI offerings to help with website visitors that were looking for a more guided experience."

That guided experience can take the form of more detailed floor plans or class schedules for those training to be nurses.

"With a very small marketing de-



Fields

partment at St. Ann's, we previously spent a great deal of time answering questions that were sent in to our website," she said. "Ann has been a tremendous

time saver not only for our marketing team, but our visitors getting the info they want immediately. It's a win win for all."

Aaron Fields, St. Ann's chief information officer, is the head of an 18-person team that handles the IT challenges of a community with over 1,200 employees. He calls their work a 'true help desk-type component,' providing support to the behind-the-scenes staff.

"They're helping our back-office staff [and] our nursing staff try to get the job done every day," he said. "[Just] making sure things are upgraded and working okay."

Within that team, there are focuses on networking and systems, cybersecurity, governance, risk and compliance.



Masonis

Fields also salutes the work of Katherine Streetter, St. Ann's resident engagement lead, as she transitioned from a career as a dietitian to being a member of St. Ann's IT team.

Over the past year, her focus has been on what Fields called "bleeding-edge technology."

"Her sole responsibility is to find these technologies in the long-term care space that can enhance the resident/family member/caregiver connection," he explained. "We're trying to find technologies that help the resident get through the day and combat feelings of loneliness and boredom."

Fields has helped craft an internal calendar for the IT team that looks ahead three years in order to stay ahead of the curve while answering important questions, such as, "Where do we need to be?" and "What is [future tech] going to look like?"

Some of those questions have already been answered: an increased usage of mobile technology, thanks to millennial-aged nurses who are adept at their smartphones, whether it's an Android or iPhone.

"They can do their documentation in real time, on a smaller device that's easier to maneuver and they can slip into their pocket [while] having their hands free," Fields said.

St. Ann's is also the launching of WorkStation on Wheels (WOW) carts, which Fields described as "a laptop inside a cart."

"The idea is that a nurse or doctor can bring that into a patient's room and document whatever they may need, right there in the medical record, instead of putting it on a clipboard and then walking out to their desk and entering it in," he said.

While most of Fields' work is behind the scenes, the majority of work Travis Masonis does for Jewish Senior Life in his role as chief information officer is resident-facing.

His position is the culmination of what he calls a 15-year "love affair marrying technology and the care of others," having previously worked at Noyes Hospital in Dansville before spending the last 12 years with Jewish Senior Life.

"I love knowing that the technology that I put in place and support have a direct impact on people," he said. "The things that we do from a technology standpoint impact the lives of others in a good way."

It's all part a culture of innovation with the organization.

"[Innovation is] built into everything we do," he said. "We do take risks on technologies and sometimes they work, and sometimes they don't. That comes with the territory."



Ryan-Maruke

One of the risks that has worked is their partnership with Broomx Technologies, a Barcelona-based company that specializes in 270-degree virtual reality projectors. The

aim with this technology was to give residents who were mostly unable to leave the Jewish Senior Life premises an immersive experience.

"We can bring residents on an undersea submarine trip, we can put them in the middle of a concert or other things," he explained/

Masonis said that the experiences have led to some unexpected results with the residents.

"We've had residents who haven't spoken a word in a long time actually start to say words again, like 'sky' or 'flower,' after being put in this experience," he said.

Jewish Senior Life was an early adopter of Broomx's work — Masonis says that the company only had two units in the entire United States at the start of their partnership — and its success has Jewish Senior Life looking for more options in the realm of virtual and augmented reality.

"We're looking at expanding that particular technology," he said. "Not just for entertainment purposes, but even for cognitive fitness. I think that holds a lot of promise — it only has one way to go, and that's up."

Other things being worked on include an ongoing partnership with Rochester Institute of Technology, and Masonis noted that working with the students was vital at the height of the pandemic, and the creation of the JSL Connect smartphone app by an in-house team.

"We wanted to build it ourselves because we wanted to brand it ourselves and control every piece of content that was in it," he said. "[The app] allows family members to see what's going on at the facility and with their specific loved ones."

It's all part of fulfilling the desire to build their own solutions, according to Masonis.

Both Fields and Masonis noted that being adaptable to change is important in their positions.

"We have to be nimble with emerging technology," added Masonis, "not just for residents, but for staff as well."

"As fast as technology changes, we're looking for those fundamental shifts that will become commonplace in 10 years, because our resident population is going to change," Fields said.

Jim Barg is a Rochester-area freelance writer.

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