Spicing Up Retirement
At Independence Hill

By Nicky Rodriguez

It's a wonderful feeling to be able to escape the "to do's" and daily ins and outs that make life demanding. There is something so refreshing when you can relax without a single care and reset your state of mind. That's exactly what Independence Hill Retirement RESORT Community has in mind for you and your retirement by redefining what retirement is! Have you ever been on a cruise? The constant activities, meeting of new friends, the feeling of being on an island where your only concern is what fun and exciting activity to do next is exactly what Independence Hill Retirement Resort Communities have in store for you.

Sheer, glowing, undeniable love beams affectionately from Michelle Houriet Voutour, the moment she begins to speak about her job, her team and residents. As she describes her workplace you suddenly realize Independence Hill is not just a retirement community where she goes to work every day, but a proud place that fills her heart.

For almost 15 years, Michelle has been the Executive Director of Independence Hill, with a total of 27 years of experience in property management. She absolutely loves what she does and simply finds true joy in it.

"I take my job very seriously, and have a blast doing it!" she exclaimed with a smile.

Surrounded by an amazing staff of 165 employees, many of whom also have long-tenure, the Independence Hill team considers themselves blessed to be a part of their residents’ lives. Every team member receives a poem during their New Employee Orientation period. The literary work, titled “See Me,” is about an older woman who wishes her nurse would see her as she sees herself; as a mother, wife, teacher, dancer... or who she is inside, not just as an old woman. Once reading the poem you quickly see it is a testament to how this team views their residents and how they are intentional in their relationships with the great people they serve by truly getting to know them for who they are and how they deserve to be seen.

“Although our industry and type of work isn’t for everyone,” Michelle adamantly said, “We look to hire team members who love people… rather than people who simply claim to be “good with people”. It takes that type of heart to be here. Hiring right is what makes the difference in our community. I am really, really proud of our team because they really care. You can train someone job skills, but you cannot train people to care. We would rather hold out on filling positions until we find the right person. We are upfront with our expectations and strive for excellence.”

One employee who is new to the industry, receptionist Sophia Costantino, can speak to how she “loves working at Independence Hill,” because of the people who encompass her day.

“I really enjoy it here. It doesn’t feel like work,” Sophia smiled. “I think this industry is my calling because of the people and my daily face to face time with them. I’m someone who needs this and I love making a difference in someone’s life. The people here have so much knowledge to share.”

After watching a handful of residents walk by, Sophia begins to gush over each of them. The great pride and passion she takes in her work radiates through in her interactions with them.

“It’s more than a community. It’s family. I see them more than my family. They’re our residents. If they’re happy, we’re happy,” she simply put it.

Any misconceptions one could have about a retirement community are far from true at a retirement resort. The team works hard and they strive to maintain the great reputation Independence Hill has had for years.

“IT is hugely important that we stand by our word and do more than we promise. Trust and an upstanding reputation mean everything. We don’t ever take that lightly,” stated Michelle.

From the flavorful food prepared by their chefs, to the many events held throughout the year, planning and care go into every detail and the planning doesn’t stop with the staff. Residents are welcomed and encouraged to suggest events they would like to see. Resident Sara Schlereth partakes in a variety of the events planned by the Activities Team. The Calendar and Newsletter are published monthly with an array of opportunities for the residents to enjoy. Some activities they have always loved to do, while others become a new passion or something new to try.

“If you’re bored it’s your own fault because there’s a lot to do!” Sara exclaimed.

Resident Dr. Joe Glavan has been a bike-rider all his life. After moving in, he decided to take up swimming. When he learned about Independence Hill’s involvement in the Senior Games, he decided to compete, taking home the winning Silver Medal in 2015. He may have been the competitor with the most miles under his belt, but that didn’t stop him. He will compete again this April and plans to take home the Gold Medal for 2016 at 91 years young. Dr. Glavan thoroughly enjoys living at Independence Hill and claims to not have enough time to do it all.

“It’s an excellent feeling,” Dr. Glavan said. “You don’t feel concerned or anxious. The staff is so nice and friendly and always go out of their way for you.”

In addition to providing a beautiful and welcoming community to call home, Independence Hill offers a plethora of services to their residents to ensure they are happy and stay involved. There are transportation and shuttle services available for the residents to get up and go, 24-hour staffed Front Desk, a Beauty Shop, Movie Theater, Coffee Pub, Country Store, Business Center, Aerobics Studio and Fitness Center, Libraries, Swimming Pool, Billiard Room and more. Large, annual events have been held that extend out into the Stone Oak community as well, from Blood-Drives and Charity Runs to Car Shows and Big Band Dances, just to name a few.

“It’s really awesome that we are able to create such a positive and lively atmosphere to accompany a lifestyle that’s over the top, celebrating every occasion!” Michelle expressed. “When we have to make community decisions, we take our residents’ opinions into consideration. I like to get their input because it is their home. Even if I think something may be a great idea... my final decisions are made, keeping their input top of mind.”

Usually, “spicing up life” is not a phrase used when describing a retirement community, but it’s the way life is viewed at Independence Hill.

“As much as we love and keep tradition, we are also innovative and love to spice things up!” said Michelle. Change is embraced, new activities are welcomed and the words “we can’t” or “it’s always been done like this” are not a part of the staff’s mind set.

This Independence Hill team truly strives to keep the home of their residents upbeat, consistent and inviting, the community of their residents upbeat, consistent and inviting, the community is full of life and the residents are grateful to call this senior resort “home”.

“You make new friends. You are exposed to old and new hobbies. You find new passions. You have fun and enjoy days sprinkled with surprises,” Michelle explained. “With this great mix of awesome people and opportunities, our residents get to really enjoy all the great things life has is store for them... That’s what happens here!”

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