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Social directors keep residents of Palace communities active

BY KERRY PHILLIPS

On any given day at a Palace senior living community, there are a host of activities taking place from morning into the night — all under the guidance of the entertainment/social directors.

These are the people who are the social fiber of the community. They are the reason that people leave their apartments to exercise, attend a lecture, take a new class, listen to music, go to a Happy Hour, take an outing, and so much more.

Each social director draws on his/her varied background and experiences, including as entertainers on cruise ships.

Adrian Cabrera recently was promoted to head activities at The Palace Suites, the independent living community at the Kendall campus. He has been with The Palace Coral Gables for three years as the assistant entertainment director and learned activity programming and entertainment management under the guidance of Pam Parker, the community's entertainment director.

Parker has been with The Palace for 15 years, having worked with The Palace Royale and The Palace Suites. She moved to The Palace Coral Gables to launch the community's activity programming. She has theatrical experience and was an actress, cruise ship entertainer and hotel social director. She has a Bachelor of Arts in theater and took special clown training while at FSU. Parker also won the NAHB's 55+ Best Lifestyle Director Award in 2016 in a national award competition.

On the Kendall campus at The Palace Renaissance, Maggie Miranda leads programs for residents in assisted living. Miranda was a private duty aide for a resident living at The Palace Renaissance. She volunteered assisting with programs and learned what it takes to get residents involved. She started with the community as an activity assistant and was quickly promoted to the director of activities where she has been for 13 years.

Also located on the Kendall campus, Susan Waitzman runs activities at The Palace Royale which offers catered living. A degree in hospitality tourism and recreation sports business management from Niagara University, she has experience as a performer and singer and worked on cruise ships for 12 years.

Debbie Horvitz manages a similar program at The Palace Nursing & Rehabilitation Center where she has been for 27 years. She has a Bachelor of Science in special education and an activity director certification license. She also served as president (1988-90) of the Dade County Activity Directors Association.



Pictured (l-r) are Debbie Horvitz, Maggie Miranda, Adrian Cabrera and Pamela Parker.

Each entertainment/social director puts their own spin on their monthly calendar of activities that needs to offer dimensions in health and wellness and incorporate social, entertainment, spiritual, physical, occupational, cultural, educational, environmental and intellectual components for residents.

For example, Parker creates and manages nearly 200 events monthly with programs beginning at 8:30 a.m. and ending at 9:30 p.m. Unique to The Palace Coral Gables is offering concurrent activities to give residents greater choices, live entertainment each day, and after-dinner programs.

While The Palace Suites residents also enjoy evening activities, Miranda, Waitzman and Horvitz keep their residents busy during the day and activities usually end much earlier.

In planning a monthly calendar, each social director focuses on activity blocks combining the lifestyle pillars which provide diversification and choice. There is a rhyme and reason behind every activity on the monthly calendar. Activity directors are sensitive to residents' schedules (i.e. wellness classes may be available during morning hours with noncompeting activities while the afternoon offers wellness classes, educational, intellectual opportunities).

Contrary to many retirement communities that rarely have after-dinner programming, Palace Suites and Palace Coral Gables residents want fun activities in the evening. Consequently, there is both before and after-dinner entertainment/activities. Just like a cruise ship, the party continues nightly.

The Palace's proprietary Customer Relation-

ship Management (CRM) software helps the activity directors gain information about residents enabling them to gear activities to common interests.

Miranda often supervises three concurrent daytime activities to appeal to various levels of cognition of her residents. She balances multiple activities and residents could be participating in a group sing-along, playing dominos, or socializing over a home-inspired project. She also supervises vol-

unteers.

Activities at all Palace communities are 24/7 and activity directors' schedules include evening and weekends and holidays. A day may start at 7 a.m. and end at 9:30 p.m.

Each month there are themed "family/friends events" at no charge for guests. That is a Palace tradition and extends to holiday celebrations.

"Seeing their smiles" keeps Miranda inspired.

"Hearing their laughter is gold to me," Waitzman said. "When I see an individual come to The Palace from a world with very little socializing and after a short time blossoms with new found friends, activities and health, I couldn't be happier. People are brought together like a family and it's truly amazing to see their turnaround."

Palace entertainment/social directors balance and juggle a range of responsibilities.

"The job requires creativity, event planning and management, communication skills, ability to work with a budget, booking talent and scouting instructors, while keeping an eye on the details, all while focusing on the residents' and their needs," Waitzman explained.

To someone thinking that this could be a career worth pursuing, the Palace activity directors recommend a degree in recreational therapy.

"Like the old joke that goes, how do I get to Carnegie Hall? Practice. Seriously, if you have a desire to help others and work with seniors, run, don't walk to the nearest assisted living community and volunteer or work as an intern," Waitzman recommends. "Let them know you want to work in the field and take any position you can. It is the most rewarding job you can have."