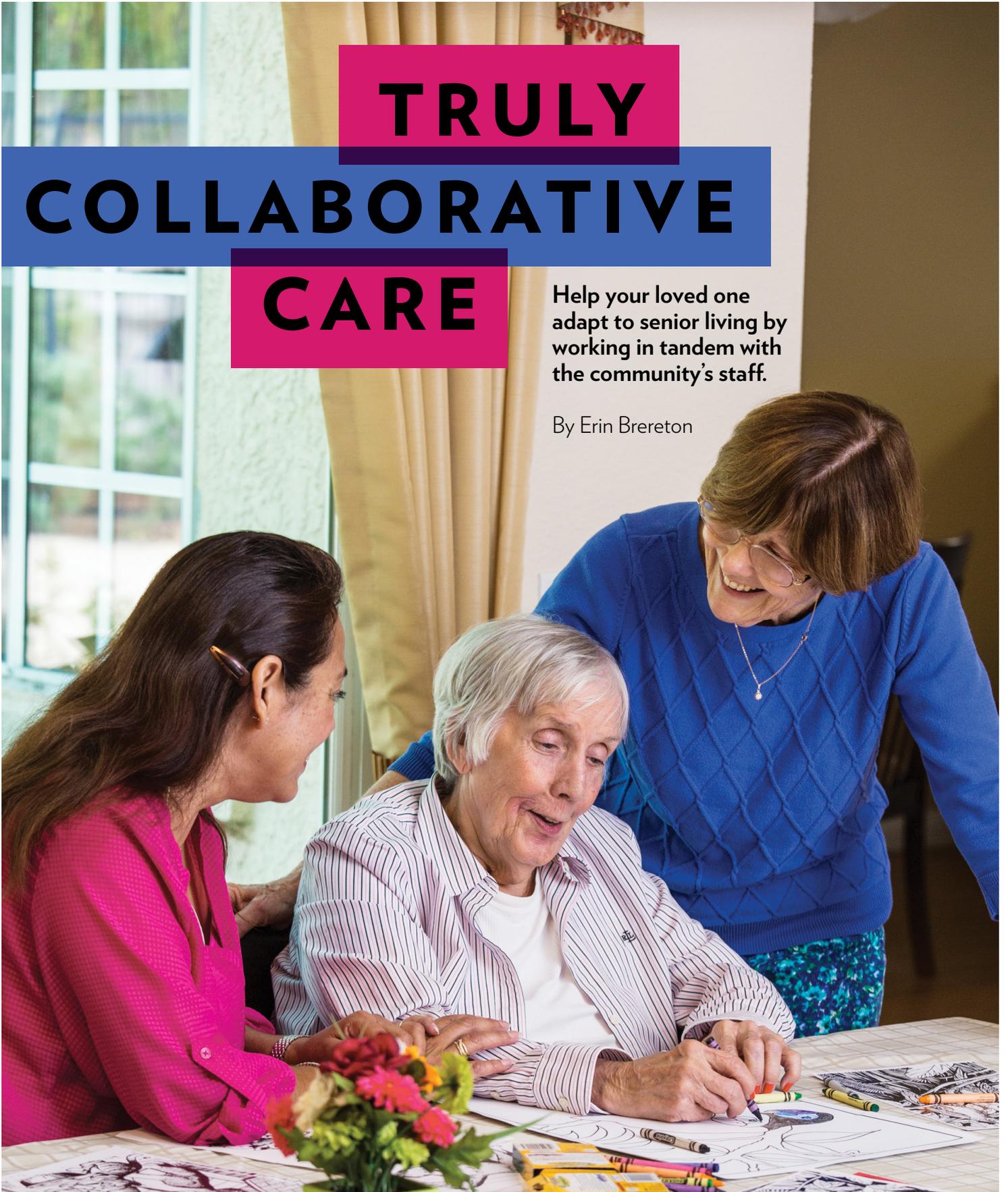


TRULY COLLABORATIVE CARE

Help your loved one adapt to senior living by working in tandem with the community's staff.

By Erin Brereton



Joanne Lamberty, right, says Ofelia Muett, director of The Hacienda, and other staff do a wonderful job with her sister, Judy Nichol.

When Joanne Lamberty's sister, Judy Nichol, began experiencing memory problems five or six years ago, her family arranged 24-hour care in her Pacific Palisades residence.

Nichol preferred not to have someone living in her home, however, and because the caretaker didn't have a car, her family—who all lived more than an hour away—stopped by frequently to take her to doctor's appointments, get groceries and run other errands.

"The distance got to be a bit too much for us," Lamberty says. "So we started looking for a senior living community in the San Gabriel Valley, and many were within a reasonable distance, and then started bringing Judy to different senior residences to look."

The prospect of moving into a community didn't initially interest Nichol, who sometimes has difficulty walking due to knee-replacement surgery. "She wasn't thrilled," her sister says. "She was willing to move to a place in Pasadena, but it was five stories, and we weren't sure how she'd do taking the elevator to the dining room—and then Judy decided she wasn't going to go."

After researching the assisted living and memory care options at Westminster Gardens, a be.group senior living community in Duarte, California, Lamberty made an appointment to tour the community. She then brought her sister to an open house and later their brother Charles visited. They were all pleased to find the dining and residence areas were on one floor. Nichol, an avid gardener, also liked the foliage-filled grounds, and the layout reminded the sisters of a resort their grandfather once owned on the St. Lawrence River in Canada.

"We were so impressed—everyone we met was so kind and friendly," Lamberty says. "The first time Judy saw Westminster, she said, 'Well, I hate to leave my home, but if I have to go anywhere, this is where

I want to come.'"

The family worked with staff at Westminster Gardens to determine if assisted living would provide the right level of care. In February 2014, Nichol moved into a one-bedroom apartment at Westminster Gardens, complete with a patio for her plants—primarily ficus trees, impatiens and geraniums, along with some succulents and orchids. An assisted living caregiver helped her water the plants each week.

After about three months in assisted living, Westminster's staff noticed Nichol was experiencing some additional memory and cognition impairment and called Lamberty in for a family care conference.

She met with a team of staff members, including a registered nurse and the director of patient services, and then toured The Hacienda, Westminster's memory care center, and decided it was the best fit for her sister.

The family has been impressed with the care Nichol receives. Staff members take her for walks and, after a couple of balance-related falls, provide a dedicated nighttime caregiver. "They are amazing people," she says.

As with all residents, memory care employees—referred to as Guías at The Hacienda—are also careful to monitor Nichol's moods, walking and overall health. Lamberty was concerned one day when she noticed her sister was agitated because her watch wasn't on her arm. The family reached out to the staff.

"They spent three to four days looking for that watch everywhere," she says. "It turned out the lady that sits next to Judy a lot of times wears a fanny pack, and my sister handed the watch to her [for safekeeping]



Lamberty, left, and family helped find a senior living community that was a good fit for their sister.

after she took it off and couldn't get it back on again."

Another day, when Lamberty discovered all of Nichol's lipsticks were missing, her caregivers searched for the missing makeup until it was found—in Nichol's pockets. "She doesn't always remember where she puts things," Lamberty says.

Westminster orders and distributes residents' medication, which has been a relief for Lamberty, who used to handle the process. "For years, when Judy was living at home, I was ordering her medications and putting them in little cases and hoping she was taking them correctly, which we then discovered at one point she was not," she says. "The Guías are very careful with medications."

Westminster's caregivers communicate frequently with the family, offering updates and asking questions to ensure they provide personalized care.

"The memory care manager and I email back and forth," Lamberty says. "If our brother or I have a concern, I call or email her, and she's always so reassuring—and will always follow up if there's any problem."

Nichol's former assisted living neighbors keep in touch, too, stopping by the sisters' table for a hug and a hello on the occasions when her family takes her to the dining room for dinner.



Linnea Chapman, center, is confident that her parents, June and Bob McKean, receive excellent care at Regents Point.

After making the initial move to assisted living and establishing friendships with her neighbors, Nichol was somewhat reluctant to transition again. However, after getting to know its caregivers, the memory care center has become home.

“The Guias over there are just angels.” Lamberty says. “They’re right there, anytime you need anything.”

SO HAPPY TOGETHER

Linnea Chapman’s parents, Bob and June McKean, have been married for 58 years.

Before moving into Regents Point, a be.group senior living community in Irvine, California, they’d been living in another senior community for almost three years. But after her father recovered from a subdural hematoma-related hospital stay, the community wanted to separate the couple into two apartments because they required different levels of care.

“That was the catalyst to search for the right place,” Chapman says.

Regents Point, which she found after significant research, turned out to be that location. Her parents moved into its Sunridge assisted living community nearly four years ago.

“be.group said, ‘We’re basically

full, but come in anyway,’ and they showed me the entire community including step-up care,” she says. “It had all nursing services on site, meals and medical management—and you’re still living in your own independent home. And it’s an upbeat community.”

Before her parents even moved in, Chapman found the staff to be incredibly knowledgeable and helpful.

“I met with every key staff member—the medical director, the resident services and nursing managers, and onsite social worker—my parents were also involved in touring and the Q&A,” she says. “It was definitely a two-way conversation.”

In addition to providing a two-bedroom, two-bathroom apartment for her parents, the community also welcomed her father’s cat Sassy, who they’d adopted after the cat snuck into the family’s rental car during a family trip to Canada.

“My dad simply adores and couldn’t part with his beloved cat,” she says. “Other places didn’t accept pets or would say you can kind of have it here, but it’s not supposed to be here, so don’t tell anybody.”

Through its be.at home program, Regents Point provides transportation for her parents to medical appointments when she is unavailable, and pet care services,

such as cleaning the cat’s litter box when its owner isn’t feeling well.

During quick visits to see the McKeans, staff members often stop and interact with the cat. “The staff play with Sassy and she is at home; she loves them,” Chapman says. “It’s been a really great fit.”

She was amazed how willing and able Regents Point’s staff were to accommodate new residents and allow her to visit in advance of the move to map out where furniture and treasured items would be placed.

“If you want a wall taken out or put into an apartment, kitchenette, or new carpet, they’ll do it in advance, which is very unusual,” she says. “They gave us options about how to set up their room that I didn’t even think were possible. They really make it look and feel like home.”

As a result, on her parents’ first night in their new home, instead of a sea of unpacked boxes, family heirlooms hung on the walls, and personal items and clothing were neatly arranged in closets.

Regents Point’s caregivers have been keeping an eye on the couple ever since, and are in contact with Chapman at least once a day—sometimes more, if needed.

Staff members’ frequent visits keep them up on the couple’s health and other details, such as personal items the McKeans may be running low on, which both June and caregivers convey to their daughter.

“My mom is conscientious on communicating what is needed for both parents in the way of supplies that even at 85 years old she simply text messages me,” she says. “Communication is imperative. You want someone to communicate, and you want your parents taken care of,” says Chapman. ●

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