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## Providing care at Innova Health and Rehab

by Julie Fink

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Dancing a lively version of the polka or learning the classical steps to the waltz are not typical activities you might find at a nursing home, but for the administration and staff at Innova Health and Rehab in Hammonton it is part of providing a higher quality of life for its residents.

Innova Health and Rehab, 43 N. White Horse Pike in Hammonton is part of the Southern New Jersey Innova Health System, privately owned healthcare companies specializing in sub-acute, rehabilitation and long-term care.

According to Administrator Leonora Dwyer the Essentia program, a program unique to Innova, is based on the philosophy of providing enhanced activities to residents suffering with dementia, sometimes caused by Alzheimer's, to increase their quality of life.

"These programs demonstrate to the community what can be done to help these patients and that there is help," she said.

Innova prides itself on having a highly specialized unit and facility that has invested in having this type of program, environment and activities available.

Facilitated by Director of Admissions and Marketing Anne Theocharides, Innova hosts monthly dance instruction taught by professional dancers from a local dance company Shall We Dance.

"It is open to all the residents and their families, as well as, the Hammonton Seniors Club, a club of 175 members. We offer dance lessons, such as the waltz, the polka, line dancing and more, to anyone who wants to learn," Theocharides said.

The attendance has reached 30 to 35 with hopes to increase that number with the New Year, according to Theocharides.

Activities such as these also help to promote the relationship between the residents, the families and

those that care for them, she said.

"We are promoting the relationship between the residents, their families and those that care for them at Innova, because we believe that our residents are our family. Meeting the family and being with the residents should not only be during a meeting about their specific care needs but in a social setting as well with other members of the community to interact with," she continued.

Originally a one-time event planned by Dwyer, Theocharides decided to make the dance lessons a monthly activity as one of her first acts at director of admissions and marketing when she came on board in August of 2008.

Her background brought a unique perspective to rehabilitation and long-term care.

Theocharides' first career was as a high school English teacher.

She made the switch to healthcare on the advice of a friend and when her own parents began struggling with Alzheimer's, she felt it was her mission to help people anyway she could through the difficult process of aging.

"I found my niche and never looked back. I love working in elder care," she said.

"She has a masters in education and was a teacher of English who fell in love with health care. It is wonderful to work with such a person and have her caring and passionate personality," Dwyer said.

It is Theocharides' work and the many other caring staff members at Innova that make love visible, Dwyer continued.

"The work of the people at Innova is love made visible," Dwyer said.

"It is a privilege to be taking care of the communities' loved ones. These people contributed in society by raising their families, fighting in wars, running businesses in town and more; it is my belief that we can't do enough for them," Theocharides said.

The facility also hosts quarterly educational sessions with an elder care attorney for family members and those interested in topics such as Medicare and



THG/Julie Fink

**Innova Health and Rehab Administrator Leonora Dwyer and Director of Admissions and Marketing Anne Theocharides are committed to providing the residents of Innova a high quality of life with high quality care.**

Medicaid applications, living wills and more to provide them an opportunity to get answers in a relaxed and informal setting.

"We like to present Innova as a place where people can get service and information regarding the aging process. The educational sessions are presented in a gentle face to face interaction when people are faced with difficult decisions," Dwyer said.

Other events include an American Red Cross blood drive, a monthly Alzheimer's program through the

Alzheimer's Association called Maintain Your Brain, and CPR classes.

In addition, on February 20 the staff of Innova is planning a talent show in order to entertain the residents with fun and excitement.

For Theocharides, it is important for the community to understand and get to know Innova well before they ever need their services.

For more information on Innova Health and Rehab call 567-3100.