

Make 'going green' a way of life

A garden oasis on the grounds of The Orchards at Southington could symbolize the Green Initiative that was launched six years ago. This outdoor sanctuary not only attracts songbirds and butterflies but people who like to relax in the tranquil setting or walk along the peaceful paths.

The natural environment is not just outdoors at The Orchards; it extends within the senior community as well where this eco-friendly approach has been integrated into the daily life and physical footprint.

The building-wide initiative engages every segment of the population including staff, residents and families to make "going green" a way of life. Their mantra is the "4 Rs" – reduction, reuse, recycling and recovery. Through the direction of the Green Committee, the goal of a healthier and more environmentally pro-active community has been achieved through myriad sustainable practices.

"We realized the potential impact of going green was for the health of everyone," explained Kathleen Johnson, director of environmental services. "There's tremendous satisfaction in knowing that each and every person is making a difference."

Caustic cleaning chemicals have been replaced by natural products, foam disposables have been substituted by paper goods, a new method of carpet cleaning uses 90 percent less water, a hybrid sedan consumes one-third less fuel, and waste has been significantly reduced. Outdoors, the garden plants are nurtured by kitchen compost while proceeds generated from more than 60,000 recycled beverage containers have funded the ongoing improvements.

The feedback from residents and their loved ones and staff has been overwhelmingly positive. "This program generates not only an environmental benefit and beautifies the grounds, but it unites all members of the community toward a common goal," according to Executive Director Audrey Vinci.

The Orchards' Green Initiative gained national recognition from the Assisted Living Federation of America and the International Council on Active Aging, both of which have granted it "best of the best" awards.

This "green" mission is ever-evolving as new products and methods are introduced. The Orchards recently joined the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's WasteWise program and Food Recovery Challenge. "We are always on the lookout for other ways to make a difference," Vinci said.

In addition, other Central Connecticut Senior Health Services' communities have also successfully incorporated Green Initiatives to ensure healthier living and minimize the impact on the environment.