



James McPeak Jr., owner of McPeak's Assisted Living in Patchogue, stands in the 51-bed facility's main room with residents. His parents, both registered nurses, founded the business in 1956.

At a glance

- **Company** McPeak's Assisted Living
- **Owner** James McPeak Jr.
- **Founded** 1956
- **Beds** 51
- **Employees** 25

or "The Carol Burnett Show," or making a flower garden from paper plates to be displayed in the sitting area.

When Therese LeMaire first walked into McPeak's, she heard big band music playing and smelled the aroma of something delicious cooking for lunch. "I couldn't help but smile," says LeMaire, who lives in Florida. Her 89-year-old mother has lived there for about a year.

"I was concerned about my mother being acclimated to a new environment," she says. "She's made friends . . . and tells me how much she enjoys the meals, musical performances and especially pet day on Wednesday. This is a family environment."

Pressure on wages

McPeak, who has a bachelor of science degree in health services administration, says it was "natural for me to help my mother operate the business when my father passed in 1997."

He says his goal is to be sure not only residents are happy, but staff, too. In an industry known for high turnover, he proudly lists longtime employees: "Our head of recreation retired after 28 years. Our cook has been here 16 years, our manager 13."

McPeak says no one makes minimum wage and, at 25 employees, he is somewhat overstaffed. One of his challenges is how he will handle the state-mandated minimum wage increase in a couple of years. "It will put pressure on wages," he says.

Regulatory and legislative changes keep him up at night. "Assisted living and adult homes can be forgotten or dismissed when it comes to the state budget," he says.

As McPeak's celebrates its 60th year in business, he knows it's not time to get comfortable.

Building relationships

FitzPatrick recommends McPeak build and maintain

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TRADITION of caregiving

Family-run assisted living home has seen market change

BY SHERYL NANCE-NASH
Special to Newsday

Caregiving is a family tradition for the McPeaks. Sixty years ago, registered nurses James and Katherine McPeak founded McPeak's Assisted Living in Patchogue. Today, their son James McPeak Jr. runs the 51-bed business, housed in a Victorian mansion built in 1924.

With more than 75 assisted living facilities on Long Island, including many operated by big providers such as Atria, Sunrise and The Bristol, there's a lot more competition than there was decades ago. There are a number of options for potential residents, and for prospective employees.

But McPeak, 60, says his facility's small size can be an advantage. For example, "huge facili-

ties may not be a good fit for someone with cognitive impairment," he says; they may be better off at a smaller place.

While McPeak's has a few openings right now, he said his business did not take a hit as big players have moved into the Long Island market. In fact, McPeak said, the big chains sometimes refer people to him.

Competitive pricing has helped McPeak's thrive, he said. Basic monthly rent is \$3,000 for a semiprivate room.

'Homey atmosphere'

Jennifer FitzPatrick, author of "Cruising Through Caregiving: Reducing The Stress of Caring for Your Loved One," says that some older adults and their families prefer an independent over large chains. She offers this advice for McPeak's and other Long Island independents: "Focus on marketing how you are different. For example, is

your niche your excellent food prepared by an award-winning chef or your stellar memory care services? Develop a niche or brand that makes you unique."

Joe Palazzo certainly thinks McPeak's is one-of-a-kind. His mother Lucy is 84 with dementia. She has been at McPeak's for two years. "It's a homey atmosphere being in a Victorian fishing captain's house, it's not institutional at all," says Palazzo, who lives in Islip. He researched options and feels confident in his choice. "They take the utmost care of my mom. I never worry about her."

Residents enjoy picnics in the Japanese garden on the grounds, have a beauty and barber shop and activities including arts and crafts, cards, games, and guest entertainment. You might catch residents watching DVDs of "The Dick Van Dyke Show"



McPeak's Assisted Living in Patchogue, founded in 1956 in a 1924 mansion, has seen some changes in the market.

Assisted living amid changes

CARE from A37

relationships with qualified referral sources such as hospital discharge planners and geriatric managers.

"Host regular events to show off your food. Let potential referral sources and families in the community see a well-trained, professional staff. Offer some type of irresistible entertainment, education or information that can't be found elsewhere," she adds.

Another way for McPeak's and other small assisted living facilities to shine is to team up with in-

dustry providers, says Rachel Doyle, founder and CEO of GlamourGals Foundation in Commack. She works with senior homes on Long Island, organizing volunteers to provide companionship and complimentary beauty makeovers to residents.

"Bring in elder care attorneys . . . physicians and specialists that do house calls. This increases the quality of life for the residents. Families will help spread the word about your business," adds Greg Solometo, CEO of Alliance Homecare in Manhattan.

When the minimum wage increases, it will be challenging, but also create opportunities. "Better wages for direct care staff may very well increase the pool of better qualified candidates," FitzPatrick says.

As for regulatory and legislative opportunities, get help from the state chapter of Argentum, the national senior living trade association, FitzPatrick says. "Independent assisted living owners should form a coalition and contribute to the hiring of a consultant who could monitor regulations and shepherd them through changes," she says.