

# Generations

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## Grand Forks' Valley Senior Living celebrating its 100th anniversary

BY PAMELA KNUDSON

Grand Forks Herald  
GRAND FORKS – The values and deep-seated compassion that guided the establishment of the first residential care center for the elderly in Grand Forks a century ago largely remain at the core of Valley Senior Living organization's mission today, according to the organization's chief executive.

"As much as we think we've changed over the years, it's surprising how little we've changed," said Garth Rydland, president and CEO.

This year, Valley Senior Living will celebrate its 100th anniversary. The actual anniversary is Oct. 15.

"We'll touch on (the anniversary) throughout the year," said Sally Grosgebauer, VSL's director of marketing. A more formal celebration event has yet not been planned, but likely will occur sometime this fall.

From its humble roots, the organization has grown extensively in facilities, expanded services and impact on the community, Rydland said. "It is preeminently the home of the residents."

He quoted from a document, dated 1927, that explained who owns the Grand Forks Home for the Aged, the first facility – built on Almonte Avenue – of the organization that later became Valley Senior Living.

"It is a church-governed organization, a not-for-profit,"



Valley Senior Living

From left; Darlene Larson, Tom Carson, Verona Poolman and Emily Rapacz play bingo at Valley Senior Living Tuesday, February 27, 2024.

he said. "It's remarkable to be part of an organization that's been open for 100 years."

Today, Valley Senior Living provides a home environment for seniors in three care communities in Grand Forks. It serves nearly 550 residents and employs about 850.

### History of caring

As the 100th anniversary approaches, Rydland has been

reading and reflecting a lot on historical documents, and the people who founded the organization, he said.

"It's very interesting. I get a sense of it because I have this general ledger that has all the board meeting minutes going back to 1917. It is really something," he said. "Most of it's written in English, some of it's in Norwegian."

Back in 1917, local residents

– Lutheran church pastors and members of women's groups – got together to discuss the need for a place where older folks could live and be cared for. These people, representing Scandinavian churches, were primarily Norwegians. They recognized that older residents – many of them immigrants who had moved into the area – were getting older, had no family members here.

"They needed somebody to care for them, but they had nowhere to go," Rydland said, "and (they asked) what are we going to do?"

This group drew up and filed articles of incorporation in March 1917, he said. "And the next month we declared war on Germany for WWI."

His reading further revealed a concern that "maybe this isn't the best time to be trying to raise money to build a nursing home with the uncertainty in the world right now," he said. "So they paused, until 1919, before they acquired some property."

The Lutheran churches' women's groups, part of the Bethesda Association (later, Bethesda Society) – otherwise known as the Ladies Aid – raised funds for the building that would be built at 1023 Almonte Ave.

The Grand Forks Home for the Aged was built at a cost of \$30,000, Rydland said.

When it opened in 1924, prospective residents filled out a bilingual application – one side in Norwegian and the other side in English, he said. Among them were people who were born in Norway and Austria.

The facility housed 40 residents and had three staff members: a superintendent, a matron and a custodian who lived on site.

The home only accepted, as residents, "people of high

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character,” Rydland said. Also an applicant had to be Scandinavian, Lutheran and a person of good repute.

“I think this speaks to the fact that this was a group of people who were serious about meeting a need and making that happen,” he said.

In 1927, an addition was built onto the Grand Forks Home for the Aged to allow for more residents. The name was changed to Valley Memorial Home in 1959; the structure was destroyed in the Flood of '97.

## Expanded facilities, services

Over the decades, as demand for skilled nursing long-term care increased, so did Valley Memorial Home’s footprint.

In 1970, Tufte Manor was built at 3300 Cherry St. to offer a level of care, known as basic care, for about 70 residents. In 1981, Valley Senior Living

was built at 2900 14th Ave. S. to provide skilled nursing care for about 180 residents.

In 1998, Valley Senior Living on 42nd was built at 4000 24th Ave. S. and became Grand Forks’ first “retirement community,” offering numerous levels of care, including skilled nursing care, memory care, assisted living and independent living with abundant amenities all in one care community.

In 2014, Cherrywood Village, a facility of affordable apartments for independent seniors age 62 and older who qualify as low-income, was added at Valley Senior Living on Cherry.

## ‘Revolutionary changes’

In the past 100 years, systems of housing and caring for the elderly have seen “pretty revolutionary changes, especially in technology,” Rydland said.

In the past, the effects of chronic conditions, such as diabetes, forced people into nursing homes. With the development of home health-monitoring devices and other equipment – some with warning systems so health professionals can intervene, when

necessary – that is no longer the case, he said.

Consequently, by the time they need skilled care nursing, people may be coming to Valley Senior Living with increased health care needs.

Technology has allowed people “to live in a place of their choosing as long as that’s possible,” he said. “And we are happy about that. ... (But) at some point you need somebody to provide care. We provide 24-hour care for residents within our care communities.”

“We are the skilled nursing provider for Grand Forks and East Grand Forks,” Rydland said.

## ‘Unique’ organization

Rydland hopes that, in celebrating the 100th anniversary of Valley Senior Living, the public will gain a deeper

appreciation of “how unique it is to have an organization come together in their common concern for older people,” he said. And that the locally-owned Valley Senior Living “is really unique in this day and age.”

“It’s very humbling, but it’s something we can be proud of – that local control continues today,” Rydland said. The founders would be “amazed” at how the Valley Senior Living organization has developed.

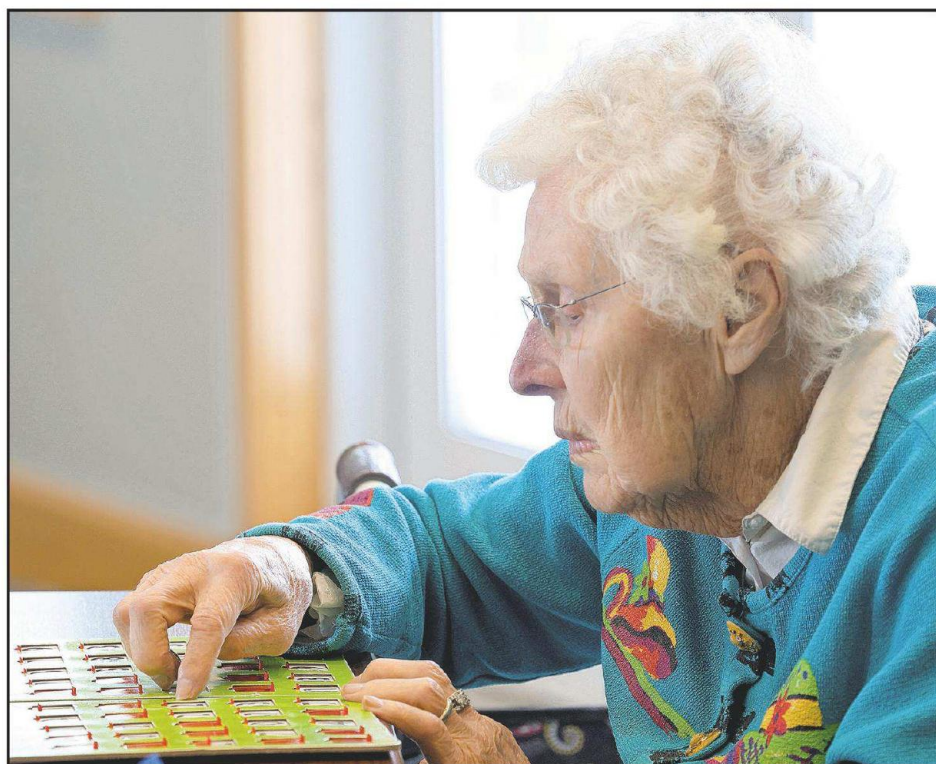
“We may use different words” than the founders did, he said, but the underlying guiding philosophy is evident today, even after 100 years.

The founding concepts related to “who we are and why we’re here” are intact, he said. “Everything starts with relationships.”



Photo courtesy of Sally Grosgebauer / Valley Senior Living

Tufte Manor, as it appeared when it was built in 1970, has since been renamed Valley Senior Living on Cherry - Tufte Manor.



Valley Senior Living

Valley Senior Living resident Lois Axtman plays bingo Tuesday, Feb. 27, 2024 at the center.

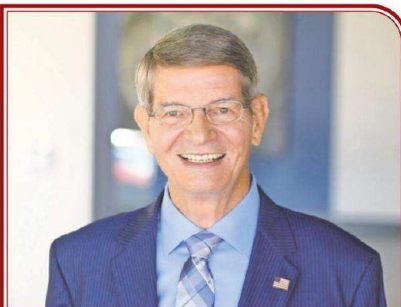
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