



Putting People Above Profits

Several years ago, Leilani Schenkel had a gem of an idea floating around in her mind. She wanted to do something that truly mattered and would make a real difference in people's lives. It took a little while for the idea to crystalize but when it did, Schenkel learned all she could about a type of senior residential care that would be new to Great Bend.

The result was the opening of Almost Home Inc., 1919 Van Buren, four years ago this month on March 17, 2014. Schenkel is executive director of the non-profit entity; her husband, Scott, has been at her side for the entire journey. "Scott has always shared the vision and the commitment," she said. "And I cannot count the number of man hours he has devoted to anything we need, including maintenance and construction. I simply couldn't have done this without him."

The residence was completely remodeled before opening its doors. Capacity is 10 people, including two residents who need end-of-life care. One service is full-time residential care. However, if someone needs short-term care while recovering from a surgery or illness, Almost Home can oblige. Another service is respite care for up to 30 days. "For example, if a family is planning a vacation, their loved one can stay with us while they are away," Schenkel explained.

Adult daycare also is provided. This is designed for someone who needs a place to stay for less than 24 hours, while family members run errands or enjoy some leisure time. While the mission of Almost Home will never change, there have been a number of physical improvements since opening day. "From day one, we have been passionate about providing a high quality of care in a home-like environment," Schenkel said. "And our staff-to-resident ratio exceeds industry standards."

The staff of 28 includes seven registered nurses, including Schenkel, along with certified nurse's aides and certified medication aides. Ten employees are full-time and 18 are part-time. "Our staff is the reason we have been successful," Schenkel emphasized. "They are compassionate and professional, and take pride in what they do. They provide a lot of one-on-one, tender-loving care. They are committed to our residents and their families. Our seven-member board of directors also should be commended. They have been supportive since the very beginning."

Staff members combine efforts to provide medical care, three home-cooked meals a day, snacks and activities. "Breakfast is made to order because people wake up at different times," Schenkel noted. "Lunch and dinner are served family style."



Almost Home Inc. is located at 1919 Van Buren in the heart of a warm and inviting residential neighborhood in Great Bend. Residents feel like they are "almost home" because of the cozy home-like atmosphere.

Improvements to the facility during the last four years include an on-site hospice retreat; Almost Home collaborates with a local licensed hospice-care provider. "We can have two residents at one time who need end-of-life care," Schenkel said. "This new facility gives the family a chance to step away to a private setting, eat a meal and take a shower. They have the opportunity to be a caring family member, not the primary caregiver. We just wanted to offer a welcoming retreat where families could have some private time."

The rest of the building is used for office and storage space. Most recently, Almost Home added a 14-by-36-foot room at the back of the residence. It is used for family meals, visiting, church services and other activities. It is equipped with a flat-screen TV. "This great open space with a vaulted ceiling was made possible by the 100 Who Care project," Schenkel said. "We were so gratified to be the first recipient of the group's generosity. The \$10,000 we received was seed money for this solarium project that lets the light shine in."

Other enhancements include a covered patio, landscaping, a Facebook page and website address, which is www.almosthomeinc.org. "We also are excited about an increase in the number of volunteers," Schenkel commented. "Our weeks are packed with activities and we do exercises every day. Those interested in volunteering their time and talents are encouraged to give us a call."

Some area doctors visit their patients at Almost Home once a month. Anyone with questions is encouraged to call 620-617-1634 anytime.

Schenkel's professional and educational background guided her to the doors of Almost Home. She has a bachelor's degree in nursing and is a paramedic. She spent 17 years as an emergency room nurse at Central Kansas Medical Center, which is now St. Rose Health Center. In addition, Schenkel was a flight nurse and marketing director with EagleMed, and director of nursing at Clara Barton Hospital. She also was chief nursing officer and chief operating officer at CKMC. "The community's spirit and our exceptional staff combined to allow us to offer this type of care in Great Bend," Schenkel said. "Because of our non-profit status, it will be sustainable far into the future. Yes, this was my vision but the community has brought it into focus."

