

Keeping Care in the Community

Why our nursing and retirement homes in WL and Wilton are important
Chad Thomas, General Counsel/HR Director of Simpson Memorial Home Inc.

My grandmother spent the last year of her life at Simpson Memorial Home. I spent quite a bit of time with her as a child but saw her infrequently as an adult until she moved to the community that I live and work in. That final year was important to me. I redeveloped a connection with her and memories that I never would have had if I could not see her most every day.

Of greater significance, that last year was important to her; her quality of life and her passing away in comfort. The staff at Simpson Memorial Home does a great job of taking care of the residents to meet their physical and emotional needs, but the impact of a resident being able to frequently and regularly see a spouse, siblings, children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, and friends is a huge emotional boost.

I saw my grandmother spark up each time I and other family members would stop in to see her, and I see that same spark in other residents when family or friends come in to visit. Fortunately, I can say that this is something I see most every day. Simpson Memorial Home serves many people who lived and worked in West Liberty, Nichols, Atalissa, and surrounding areas and whose families and friends also live and work in these same communities. With busy schedules and busy lives, the frequent visits from friends and family are made possible when residents can stay in their own community.

Despite the benefit of remaining in your own community for care and rehabilitation, the trend in the healthcare industry has been to consolidate care into urban areas rather than spread services out to rural communities. Specific to long term care, since January of 2017 a review of new skilled care beds put into service shows that 84 percent of those new services were in urban areas. There are good economic and cost reasons for this consolidation to larger cities, but cost analyses do not account for the personal toll of what is lost in social contact when a resident has to get care 30, 40, 60 miles away from their family, friends, and community.

The need for long term care will be increasing over the next several years and the complexity of the care that people need is also on the rise. The current Simpson Memorial Home has served the community for 45 years but cannot keep pace with the medical needs and technology advances that are occurring in healthcare. We have had instances where we have not been able to provide care for community members because we lacked the ability to meet their needs in our current building. Those situations are difficult for the residents, for their families, and for us. Our hope with a new building would be to improve our capacity to provide complex services and keep most or all of those residents near home instead of Iowa City/Cedar Rapids or the Quad Cities.

The for-profit healthcare market is not going to build new facilities in a rural community like West Liberty. If we want to keep these services local and keep our community members near to family and friends, our community needs to come together with its time, its talent, and its financial resources to carry out the mission that Nora Simpson, our original benefactor, started over fifty years ago when she funded the development of a community based non-profit to provide care for the elderly that lived in West Liberty and surrounding communities. Ms. Simpson's original vision and donation have served the community well, and we hope for the community's continued support as we prepare for the next fifty years of service.