

At Asbury Methodist Village in Gaithersburg, Maryland, the Rosborough Wellness and Brain Health Center for Excellence features a rock climbing wall. Individuals can use the wall to improve their strength and motor skills

Doug Leidig:

Providing opportunities to live your best life at Asbury Communities

This ICAA NuStep Pinnacle Award-winner has dedicated his career to the privilege of profoundly impacting lives every day

by Julie King, MS

This profile is part of an ongoing Journal on Active Aging® series highlighting the senior living communities, wellness executives and wellness directors that have won ICAA NuStep Beacon and Pinnacle Awards through the ICAA NuStep Best in Wellness Awards.

Doug Leidig started paving the path for his lifelong career at age 12. Delivering 250 newspapers on his paper route should have taken about an hour, but Leidig almost always took 90 minutes because he stopped and talked with his customers along the way.

“Many of the older adults on my route lived alone, and I realized I might be the only visitor some would see that day,” Leidig remembers. “I loved hearing their stories and learning about their lives. They also took an interest in me through high school.”

That experience of “having 250 grandparents” taught him the value of connection and the importance of listening. “Those early conversations shaped the way I think about community and aging—and ultimately led me to a career where relationships and purpose are the center of what we do.”

A winner of the 2023 ICAA NuStep Pinnacle Award as one of the top five wellness executives in North America, Leidig is now the

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Wellness is foundational to purpose, satisfaction and achievement, regardless of age. Personally, I have prioritized wellness all my life, and that focus carried over to my work as CEO,' says Doug Leidig, president and CEO of Asbury Communities, Inc.

president and CEO of Asbury Communities, Inc., in Frederick, Maryland. He oversees six life plan/continuing care retirement communities (CCRCs), three senior rental properties, 4,300 residents and 2,800 associates.

Guided by the principle of “doing all the good we can with integrity, transparency and grace,” the not-for-profit organization—which celebrates its centennial this year—has a history of ICAA NuStep awards:

- Asbury Solomons in Solomons, Maryland: 2023 ICAA NuStep Pinnacle Award as the top-ranked senior living community
- Asbury Methodist Village in Gaithersburg, Maryland; and Asbury Springhill in Erie, Pennsylvania: 2023 ICAA NuStep Beacon Award
- Asbury Solomons and Asbury Methodist Village: 2024 ICAA NuStep Beacon Award

- Asbury Methodist Village: 2025 ICAA NuStep Pinnacle Award
- Belinda Degbo, Director of Well-Being at Asbury Methodist Village: 2025 ICAA NuStep Pinnacle Award and 2024 (cowinner) as a top-five wellness director
- David Shoffler, Senior Director of Wellness at Asbury RiverWoods in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania: 2025 ICAA NuStep Pinnacle Award as a top-five wellness director

The International Council on Active Aging® (ICAA) and NuStep® LLC, a Michigan-based developer of inclusive fitness equipment, created the joint awards program—now the ICAA NuStep Best in Wellness Awards—in 2019 to recognize industry leaders whose commitments, innovations and achievements in wellness stand out. Under this umbrella, the Beacon Award highlights 25 of North America’s senior living communities, with the top five communities also receiving the Pinnacle Award. [Ed. See the sidebar on page 55 for more information about the awards, including the Pinnacle Award’s wellness director and wellness executive categories.]

“Doug Leidig has spent decades enhancing and advancing senior living for residents and staff through his commitment to innovating and evolving a wellness culture,” says Colin Milner, founder and CEO of ICAA. “His vision continues to shape the industry and the lives of many along the way.”

A lifetime commitment

Leidig’s journey with senior living began at age 16, when he became a nursing assistant in a local nursing home, which was “one of the most humbling experiences of my life,” he says. Working as a housekeeper and maintenance worker—and in food service, as well—he gained a holistic view of the senior-living experience.

Leidig realized that many residents did not have family members visit, and the administrator’s philosophy stuck with him: No one should die alone. “During my first summer there, I held the hands of several residents as

they passed away,” he recalls. “Those moments grounded me and shaped who I am today.”

After earning a bachelor’s degree in long-term care administration/management from York College of Pennsylvania in Grantley and an MBA from Mount St. Mary’s University in Frederick County, Maryland, Leidig became a licensed nursing home administrator, starting his career with roles at Homewood Living Ministries in both states. In 1994, he joined Asbury Communities as an administrator for its founding campus, Asbury Methodist Village in Gaithersburg, Maryland.

After leaving briefly for a stint as executive director at RiverWoods (then unaffiliated with Asbury) in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, Leidig returned to the Asbury fold in 2000. Appointed chief operating officer of Asbury Communities in 2004, he also became president of The Asbury Group in 2012. The for-profit division provides management, marketing and integrated technology consulting services to other senior living entities. These areas of focus have served Leidig well over his last decade as president and CEO of Asbury Communities. Reflecting his commitment to the industry, he has also served on numerous boards, including currently as an advisor to Senior Living 100, a C-Suite-level conference, and previously as chair of LeadingAge® Maryland, the state affiliate of the national not-for-profit association of aging services providers.

“People sometimes assume our industry must be depressing—but it’s really the opposite,” he observes. “Working in senior living, you realize how profoundly you can impact people’s lives every day. It becomes deeply meaningful work with a higher purpose.”

Evolving and engaging aging

Throughout his experiences, Leidig has aimed to evolve the traditional understanding of aging. “We have a long way to go in changing the world’s mindset about the value and contributions that older adults bring,” he says. “Retirement communities include plenty of people who do more than retire.”



Residents of Asbury Springhill exercise in the fitness and therapy pool at the Dr. Robert and Marilyn Bernhard Aquatic Center, located on the Erie, Pennsylvania, campus. Large windows invite the daylight into the welcoming space

In 2022, he and the Asbury leadership team identified well-being as the key driver and differentiator for its CCRC division. They launched a three-year strategic blueprint to create inspired connections and experiences so community members can explore possibilities to live their best lives.

“Wellness is foundational to purpose, satisfaction and achievement, regardless of age,” Leidig points out. “Personally, I have prioritized wellness all my life, and that focus carried over to my work as CEO.”

The strategic blueprint includes an Envisioned Future, which Asbury considers “the highest point of our shared company strategy direction....”¹ Based on focus group feedback from 800 associates, residents and family members, that vision aims to have well-being as a driver and outcome of all the organization does, changing lives for the better every day and redefining aging within seven years.

“Throughout my career, I’ve believed that senior living needs to shift from being reactive to proactive,” Leidig says. “That starts with an

understanding that wellness is deeply interconnected. Physical health, cognitive engagement, emotional well-being, social connection and purpose all influence one another.”

Following its strategic blueprint, Asbury created a Senior Director of Well-Being and Brain Health role and funded brain health coaches for each community’s Well-Being Team in 2023. The organization also intro-

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Asbury Methodist Village built a boxing studio in the Rosborough Wellness and Brain Health Center for Excellence. The center serves people of all abilities, including those with neurocognitive issues such as Parkinson's disease (PD), who are known to benefit from boxing

duced EngAge Well. Based on the seven dimensions of wellness, EngAge encompasses resident-run clubs, continuing education classes, a lecture series, concerts, volunteering, fitness classes and more. It is Asbury's systemwide commitment to helping older adults move better, feel better, connect more and experience more—what the organization calls its Four Tenets of Well-Being.²

The emphasis on well-being also extends to associates, who can use the fitness facilities and a concierge service to navigate health benefits. When some team members initially participated in wellness screenings and preventive care, several discovered underlying conditions like high blood pressure and cardiac concerns. In some cases, screenings resulted in immediate treatment that “likely prevented major health events,” notes Leidig.

“When associates are healthy, engaged and supported, they bring their best selves to work,” he continues. “That directly improves the experience for residents and strengthens the entire community.”

A proactive approach to cognitive vitality

Among the components of EngAge is Kinnections Brain Health, developed by Sue Paul, OTD, MBA, who leads Asbury's well-being and brain health efforts. This personalized program integrates movement, cognitive engagement, nutrition and social interaction to support long-term cognitive vitality.³

Kinnections includes a five-part neurocognitive assessment, an individualized engagement plan, coaching and retesting—or the option of the Super Seven

six-week, self-guided program.⁴ Integral to Kinnections is the Rosborough Wellness and Brain Health Center for Excellence, which serves people of all abilities with a rock wall, boxing studio and SMARTfit™ board, an exergaming system that combines cognition with physical movement.

After one year in Kinnections, 86% of participating residents improved or maintained their cognitive scores on the Montreal Cognitive Assessment (MoCA), according to Asbury's outcomes data. Among residents who began the program in the mild cognitive impairment range, nearly 44% improved to normal cognition or maintained their scores without decline.

Beyond the numbers is the feedback of residents. “Many describe feeling more con-

fidant, more connected and more engaged in their daily lives,” Leidig says. “Those stories reinforce what the data shows, because when residents have opportunities to move, learn and connect, it significantly enhances how they experience aging.”

Expectation of innovation

Technology and innovation are instrumental in delivering EngAge and evolving Asbury’s well-being culture. In addition to SMARTfit exergaming, Asbury offers:

- Rendevar virtual reality headsets to bring a world of experiences to residents
- Eversound personal headphones for those with hearing loss
- Go Icon resident engagement platform with access via computer, app or digital display board

Plus, the organization participates in the AgeTech Collaborative™ from AARP® to explore emerging technologies and innovations that can improve the aging experience. Announced in December 2024, the pilot Asbury Smart Living Showcase “features a two-bedroom apartment equipped with startup senior technology to support connected and secure living.”⁵ This space is “a real-world testing ground,” according to AgeTech Collaborative, with partners able to gain valuable resident feedback.⁶

Leidig says, “I’m incredibly proud of the innovation culture we’ve developed. We have two patents pending for an algorithm designed to predict fall risk within 30 days using data from electronic medical records. Building on that work, our clinical leadership teams have also launched the RiseWell fall prevention initiative, collaborating with technology partners to integrate predictive technology.”

For associates, Asbury has implemented more than a dozen robotic process automations that eliminate time-consuming administrative tasks and allow them to focus more on residents. ThriveWell Tech,

its internal IT organization, includes 75 associates focused on innovation and data infrastructure. ThriveWell serves Asbury as well as other senior living communities and healthcare providers.

“We are leveraging data and analytics across the organization—from marketing and recruitment to clinical outcomes and operational performance,” Leidig says. “We’ve made significant progress in becoming one of the most innovative and technology-forward organizations in senior living.”

Leidig reveals that getting buy-in across the organization was more challenging than he anticipated, noting that “building a culture

centered on innovation, data and technology takes time.” He encouraged adoption by adding leadership team members from outside the senior living industry who have introduced new ideas and ways of thinking, which he says has helped tremendously.

Another effort involved existing team members. “We identified champions among frontline associates who believed in new tools and could demonstrate early wins,” Leidig explains. “Once people began to see the potential, momentum grew quickly.”

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Shining a spotlight on Best in Wellness communities and leaders

The ICAA NuStep Best in Wellness Awards celebrate outstanding achievements in wellness within North America’s senior-living industry. Launched in 2019 by the International Council on Active Aging® (ICAA) and NuStep®, LLC, these awards recognize communities and leaders that are transforming aging by creating vibrant, engaging wellness environments to empower older adults to live their best lives.

If you want your community’s wellness achievements to be recognized, ICAA and NuStep invite you to enter the 2026 Best in Wellness Awards contest. Applications are accepted until August 15. Recipients will be announced in November at the ICAA Conference and Expo 2026 in Orlando, Florida.

The Best in Wellness Awards program presents two awards, the ICAA NuStep Beacon Award and the ICAA NuStep Pinnacle Award:

- **Senior Living Communities:** The Beacon Award highlights 25 of North

America’s senior living communities that are creating environments where people thrive, with the top five communities also receiving the Pinnacle Award. In these communities, wellness is a way of life, shaping environments that prioritize overall quality of life.

More recently, the awards program has expanded the Pinnacle Awards to recognize the top five leaders in each of two additional categories:

- **Wellness Director:** This category recognizes individuals whose innovative leadership and dedication inspire transformative wellness experiences within their communities.
- **Wellness Executive:** This category celebrates visionaries who place wellness at the heart of their organizations, fostering enduring and meaningful opportunities for both residents and staff.

Visit <https://beaconaward.icaa.cc/> to learn more about the Best in Wellness Awards.

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Asbury Methodist Village dubbed the Blue Note Bistro a ‘casually elegant’ space. The bar and pub offer a popular gathering place for residents to dine, socialize and enjoy live music and performances on the community’s Gaithersburg, Maryland, campus

Based on the seven dimensions of wellness, EngAge Well encompasses resident-run clubs, continuing education classes, a lecture series, concerts, volunteering, fitness classes and more. It is Asbury’s systemwide commitment to helping older adults move better, feel better, connect more and experience more—what the organization calls its Four Tenets of Well-Being.”

A positive impact

With more than 25 years at Asbury, Leidig is motivated by knowing what he and his teams do daily can change someone’s life. “That is extremely satisfying, and it’s a privilege to do this,” he says. “I’m blessed in my position, and with that comes the responsibility and duty to ensure our teams have the resources they need to positively impact the outcomes of everyone who lives and works at Asbury.”

To fund its well-being model, Asbury uses “entrance fees/resident revenue, bonds (in moderation), and philanthropy,” Leidig shares. “Our \$1.5-million Rosborough Center for Well-Being and Brain Health Excellence, for example, was fully funded through the gift of a resident who was passionate about cognitive health and wellness

for people with neurocognitive challenges.” Capital funds prioritized the purchases of SMARTfit boards for all communities and the hiring of brain health coaches.

Asbury has diversified as part of its commitment to redefine aging services, affiliating with Albright Care Services since 2020. Albright LIFE, a Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE), provides access to healthcare and supportive day services for eligible individuals with complex medical issues. The program fosters continued independence at home for participants. Albright’s long-term care pharmacy adds convenience for Asbury residents.

Leidig emphasizes the importance of a broader focus when it comes to advancing the senior living industry. “Curiosity is crit-

ical, and many industries are years ahead in areas like technology and analytics,” he notes. Leaders need to look outside the industry, learn from those examples and bring those ideas back to improve outcomes for residents and associates.”

As for his personal legacy? “My main goal is to leave Asbury Communities in a strong position for the next generation of associates and residents,” Leidig says. “I want Asbury to be known as a leader in innovative services, embracing technology and leveraging data to find better ways to provide care and services, to promote well-being and to change outcomes. The future of active-aging communities,” he adds, “will be driven by data, predictive analytics and personalization.”

Julie King, MS, has been a certified group exercise instructor and personal trainer for more than 25 years. She holds multiple certifications and a master’s degree in science (kinesiology). Over her career, King has led virtually every class format—including indoor cycling, mat pilates, yoga, kickboxing, boot camp and aquatics—at commercial health clubs, corporate fitness centers, wellness centers, schools and online. She also has served as a fitness director, fitness/wellness coordinator, health club manager and a contributing editor for Club Business International (now Health & Fitness Business) magazine. King has been published in Club Industry, Club Solutions, Campus Rec™, National Fitness Trade Journal, Recreation Management and Fitness Management. She is also a longtime regular contributor to the Journal on Active Aging®. King can be reached at julie.king1@comcast.net

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Images courtesy of Asbury Communities, Inc.

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Resources

Internet

Albright LIFE Center

www.albrightlife.org/

Asbury Communities, Inc.

www.asbury.org/

Asbury Communities Strategic Blueprint

www.asbury.org/our-blueprint/

Senior Wellness Programs

www.asbury.org/about/wellness-programs/

The Asbury Foundation

www.asbury.org/foundation/

The Asbury Group

www.groupasbury.com/

ICAA NuStep Best in Wellness Awards (Beacon and Pinnacle Awards)

<https://beaconaward.icaa.cc>

International Council on Active Aging (ICAA)

www.icaa.cc

NuStep, LLC

www.nustep.com

ThriveWell Tech

www.thrivewelltech.com/

Additional websites

Go Icon: Get to Know Asbury’s Resident App & Portal Powered by Go Icon

<https://goicon.com/asbury-resident-app/>

Rendever

www.rendever.com/

SMARTfit, Inc.

<https://smartfitinc.com/>

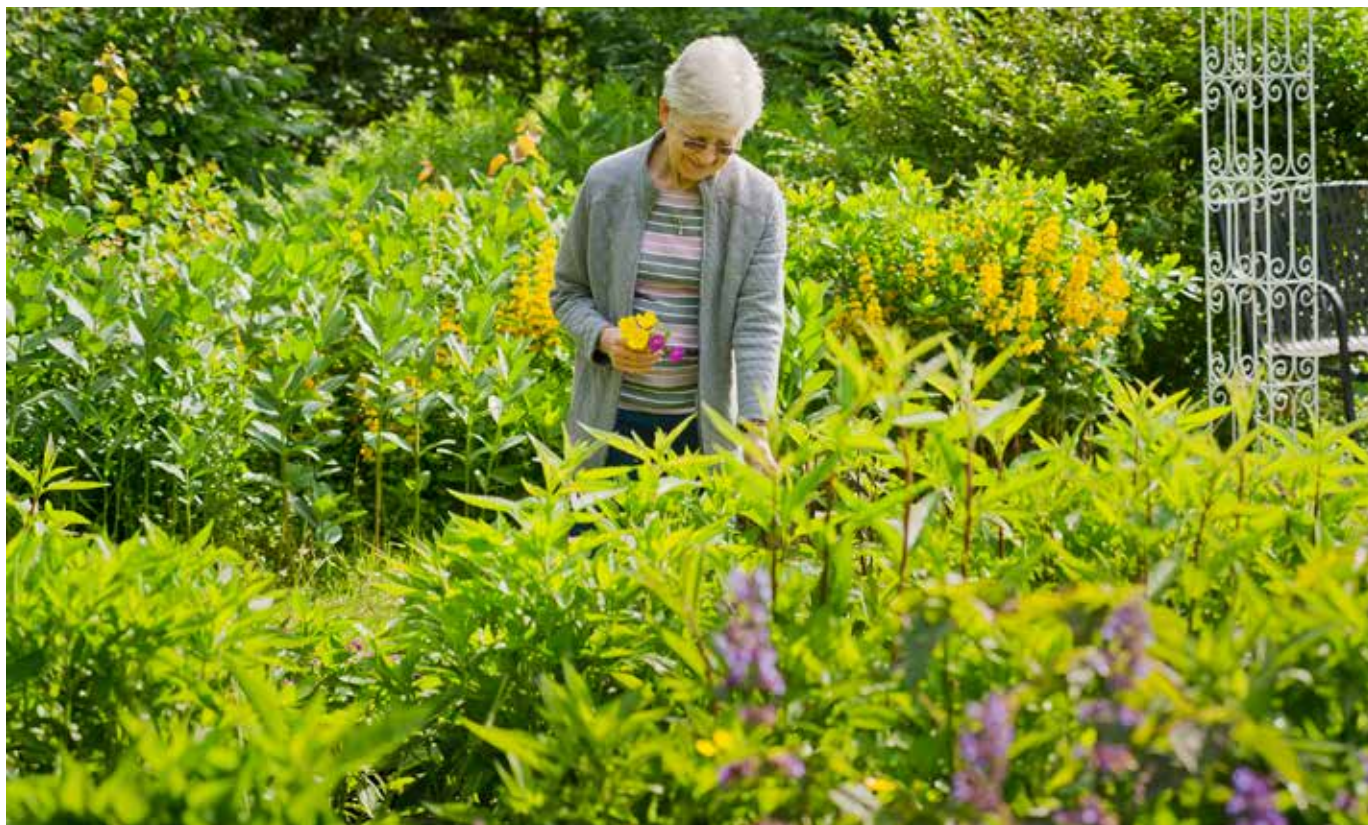
Uniguest: Eversound Wireless Headphones

<https://uniguest.com/eversound-wireless-headphones/>

Print

King, J. (2025). Asbury Solomons: Maximizing opportunities as a waterfront wellness destination. *Journal on Active Aging*, 24(6), 44–52. Available free online to ICAA members in the “Articles” archives at www.icaa.cc [search keyword *Asbury*]

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A butterfly garden draws people as well as pollinators at Asbury Springhill in Erie, Pennsylvania. The idea for the garden originated with a resident and entomology professor, reveals Asbury. Other features on the 45-acre campus include a pond, gazebo and walking trails

Success with wellness

Asbury Communities' commitment to its well-being model is a key contributor to its success. Below, President and CEO Doug Leidig highlights some ways in which the organization has demonstrated that commitment:

- **Investment:** Allocating significant resources to wellness initiatives.
- **Strategic vision:** Embedding well-being into Asbury's mission and values; including well-being goals embedded in the strategic plans and leadership communications.
- **Resident-centered design:** Incorporating well-being principles into community-wide designs and programs.

- **Staff training:** Hiring dedicated professionals like well-being directors and fitness trainers; ongoing education and program evolution for associates to align with the model.

In 2023, Leidig shared a foundation on which Asbury was building its future. One facet was that “a significant percent of our operating budget is now allocated to staff and capital projects, including technology....”

After finalizing a three-year strategic blueprint, “we began a major repositioning of our campuses, mapping out master planning priorities to achieve our Strategic Focus Area for our Community Living

Division of making Asbury's CCRCs “well-being destinations,” he continued.

The plan also included “a commitment to make a [USD\$50-million] investment in related capital projects, investing in key personnel (a Senior Director of Well-Being and Brain Health to oversee our system efforts and brain health coaches for each community). From 2022–2023 alone,” he added, “we have invested more than \$15 million in well-being-related enhancements at our communities.”