

Print Article – Community Life Director Interview

Sanctuary at Bellbrook, a retirement community located at the intersection of West Avon Road and Livernois Road offers college students the opportunity to meet the required amount of community services hours for his or her major in a warm, friendly environment while developing lasting relationships with residents and staff members.

For many college students, community service and internships are a degree requirement that can be a source of frustration. Figuring out how to fit hours of community service into an already challenging schedule can be stressful. However, Sanctuary at Bellbrook is located right across the road from the main campus of Rochester College and offers a different kind of community service, the kind of community service that can really benefit students, as well as the community the student is serving. According to Janet Allen, the Community Life Director at Sanctuary at Bellbrook, retirement communities are often overlooked by society and the larger communities surrounding them, however, they offer many opportunities for volunteers to learn, grow and give back to the residents of the community.

While other retirement communities have activity departments, Sanctuary at Bellbrook has a Community Life department, named by the residents who believe their days are not just filled with “activities” but with “life”. Residents may live in condos, independent apartments, or on the assisted living, skilled nursing, memory care or rehabilitation floors. Each area of the community has its own individual calendar, with a variety of different activities geared for the specific residents who live in that area. Allen said that the Community Life department provides programs and events for the entire retirement community of approximately 300 residents. The staff works hard to provide activities and events to match the interests of the residents. Allen said

that popular activities include Tai Chi classes, religious services and garden club. Popular events include the Exotic Zoo, themed dinners and speakers from the Detroit Institute of Art.

With such a variety of daily activities and events, Allen said that the biggest challenge for her staff of nine is finding time for one-on-one interactions with the residents. Volunteers are most needed to give the residents some personal time to talk. The residents enjoy the intergenerational aspect of talking with student volunteers on a more personal level. “Because there are approximately 300 residents, and I have a staff of nine, there are plenty of volunteer opportunities,” Allen said. The Community Life department staff and community residents appreciate everything volunteers. Whether a volunteer is interested in working on administrative projects, helping with a single social event or planning an entire event for the residents. Allen said, “We try to match up the interest of the volunteer with what we have going on. I’m not going to send somebody out and say, ‘You’re going to lead the sing-a-long today’ and you know nothing about music. I want it to be a good experience between both parties. I want to see the residents and volunteers form a special bond.”