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Amy Schoenemann Story



Amy Schoenemann was just a pre-teen girl when her beloved Grandma, Rosie Gaskell, was placed in a group home in Brookfield because of sharply declining memory. It was heartbreaking for the family in so many ways. Amy, who was just 12 at the time, vividly remembers the stark environments found inside nursing homes in that era.

That vision may have ultimately impacted Amy in a very profound way. Fast forward to more than a decade later, and Amy Schoenemann graduates from University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee with a degree in architecture. Her artistic passion becomes health care design.

Read more about Grandma Rosie and how Amy, a savvy Millennial, has built an impressive career designing senior living space where residents not only live but thrive in their environments.

(Story for website)

“Grandma Rosie was one of those grandmas who was the heart of the home,” said Amy Schoenemann, as she fondly remembered her grandmother. “Grandma’s little two bedroom home on Milwaukee’s south side was truly where all her children and grandchildren gathered.”

Rosie Gaskell was an independent older woman who didn’t drive. She lived alone after her husband passed away but had many family and friends who cared about her. Amy remembers Grandma Rosie as an “amazing cook.” When she was in her early 70’s Rosie’s family began to witness some significant memory impairment. “Everyone started checking up on her,” said Amy. “A frequent question that people would ask her, “What are you having for dinner” almost always brought the same answer – fried pork chops. Every day she would report making fried pork chops. One day a group of us cousins snuck up to her house, and ironically she was making fried pork chops!”

After some lengthy consideration, the family ultimately had to place Rosie in a group home in Brookfield as they were concerned for her health and safety. A year later, Rosie experienced congestive heart failure and her condition required her to be moved to a nursing home in Oconomowoc. Her memory had also declined sharply and she no longer remembered anyone’s names. After several years at that facility, Rosie transitioned to a third facility on Milwaukee’s south side. By this time, Amy was in high school and thinking about plans for college. She vividly remembers her thoughts about nursing homes in that era saying, “There were these cold, sterile 400 foot long hallways lined with resident rooms. And to match the unfriendly surroundings, there was often no programming for residents or ways to enrich their lives.”

Amy’s astute perception served her very well in college, as she majored in architecture and exhibited a special passion for senior care and health care design. “After graduation, I miraculously got a job at PDC Midwest,” said Amy. “They focused exclusively on senior care design. We were doing work for numerous national senior care providers that wanted to expand their memory care and skilled nursing footprints across the their United States. We designed hundreds of senior communities and I was fortunate to have consulted with some of the industry’s leading experts in memory care programming, design and operations. They had the visions, and we got to bring them to life.”

Through these partnerships, Amy was involved in designing impactful communities to improve circadian rhythm and alleviate sundowning syndrome, design resident-friendly spaces, and incorporate state-of-the-art technology to employ the newest resident programming initiatives. “The biggest reward is walking through a finished memory care building and seeing the residents thriving in a safe and enriching environment” said Amy. “During this post occupancy tour, we find out what was working and what is not working so we can then take that knowledge and move forward with new projects. In these exemplary care models, I witnessed residents singing, painting for Memories in the Making, which ultimately leads to happy families, and low resident and staff turnover. “

Amy now works for Capri Communities in real estate development where she is charged with expanding Capri’s senior living portfolio. “Capri was one of my clients when I worked at PDC Midwest. They had a great team, a great culture, and they were always focused on developing the very best environments and care outcomes for their residents,” said Amy. “Capri currently owns and manages 20 senior living

communities in Wisconsin, with over 2000 living units. We were just rated as the 58th senior living provider in 2017 by Argentum. Our communities include independent living, assisted living, high acuity environments, and memory care. Capri's approach is to build senior care continuums that allow residents to age in place within their current home."

Ironically, it's all come full circle for this Young Champion who has just been accepted into Tempo's Emerging Women Leaders group. "I would have loved for my grandma to have lived in one of the memory care units that I designed," said Amy. But in her heart, Amy knows she has made a huge difference for seniors everywhere, and that in itself is a real tribute to Grandma Rosie Gaskell.