



The LEADERSHIP LOG

More than 45 years of informed opinion about issues facing elders today.

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From the Desk of James F. Seagle, Jr. President, Rogerson Communities



The hardest part of my job is to sell the idea that investing in later life issues is a productive use of resources. In an ageist society, this concept is at once novel and counterintuitive. Donors want to give to kids or they want to give to cancer or they want to give to kids with cancer. My question has always been, “After you cure Jimmy what does he

have to look forward to?” With all of the insults to person that are natural concomitants of aging, we have added a societal propensity to neglect. Why bother? Rogerson from its inception in 1860, even before my tenure, has bothered and many have found a soft landing in late life as a result.

Our current program sits on four pillars. Our first class Operations Department manages residential and program real estate as well as anyone in the country. They do this not only on our account but also for other nonprofits who benefit from the work of Laurie Trilling and her excellent staff. We are also fair to middling real estate developers. Again, our own properties are universally successful and we have provided much-needed expertise to protect and expand the real estate holdings of other charities who we sometimes find in extremis. Next we should consider our community based programmatic system which allows even very low income elders to age in place. This system culminates in the adult day health programs which enable people qualified for nursing home placement to remain in community.

Not only did we pioneer the design but have spearheaded the growth and sustainability of this efficient health delivery system. When we started this there were a total of 36 clients in two programs in the state; we were one half of that picture. Today 16,000 clients are served in 150 programs.

Underlying all that we do in the first three pillars is our intention to innovate. Innovation does not come cheap and is not, in the main, reimbursed. We innovate because much of what we find in traditional aging services does not make sense. The inertia found in public bureaucracies and healthcare systems has left people with complicated late life issues bereft of a coordinated response. Policy continues to be built around ageist conceptions of what elders experience and of their capabilities. Our innovative interventions are fueled by the apprehension that elders can stay fully and actively engaged in the community for a decade longer than currently experienced, given the proper support.

We have built wonderful facilities but have also saved other institutions with long histories of services to their communities. We act in a businesslike way but support structured losses in adult day health and fitness first. It is truly mission first and metrics second. “Bone of our bone and blood of our blood these elder brothers who in late age have fallen on want through no fault of their own must have a safe and comfortable home.” This was the mission statement of the Boston Home for Aged Men. We have come along way but at the same time have not diverged (accept for the women) too far from this original driver. With our waiting lists about to triple, we should probably stay the course a little longer.

Now we welcome Rogerson’s new President and CEO, Walter Ramos. Over his career he has demonstrated extraordinary managerial capability, but more importantly a consistent dedication to the hardest part of this job, supporting elders in an ageist society.

James