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WHERE

LIFE

HAPPENS

A St. Joseph of  
the Pines program  
supports the  
family unit

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BY KATE  
TURGEON  
WATSON







**THE**

26,000-square-foot building sits on two acres. Built in 2011, it has a laundry room, wrap-around patio and 1970s-inspired Snoezelen room. There are bowls of mandarin oranges, friends laughing together at long tables, glasses of iced tea and televisions playing classic movies. The hum of activity is audible, but ...  
"Nobody lives here," Robert Dickson said.





It's true. Technically, 4900 Raeford Rd. Fayetteville, NC is no one's home address. There are no bedrooms, late-night snacks or personal mail. There is, however, a lot of life happening.

LIFE is the name of the program. It stands for: Living Independently For Elders, and it's run by St. Joseph of the Pines, an aging services network based in Southern Pines. LIFE is a special, more local name coined by St. Joseph of the Pines for its programs. Nationally, however, the program - which exists in 31 states - is known as PACE, or Program of All-inclusive Care for the Elderly. (Think of it this way: All LIFE programs are PACE, but not all PACE programs are LIFE.)

Most of the participants are what's called "dual eligible" and qualify for Medicare and Medicaid, Dickson, executive director, explained. They're entitled to nursing home services. But they also have a caregiver (oftentimes a family member) at home who helps care for them.

Participants spend their weekdays at LIFE, and their evenings and weekends with caregivers, such as spouses, adult children or other family members. The situation allows caregivers to work and lead their lives, and it allows participants to lead their own lives as well.

"If you're taking care of your elder family member that can be a full-time job in itself," Dickson said. "[With LIFE] caregivers can remain involved in their community and still honor that commitment to their family member."

## THE RIVAS

That's how it works for Hipolito Rivas, 73, (seen on cover) and his wife Antoinet, 67. He's

a participant and she supports him by visiting LIFE and staying involved in their community. The pair moved to Fayetteville 10 years ago from New York. Originally from Honduras, they learned about the LIFE program from friends.

"He says it's like heaven here. He does exercise and is happier," she said.

Through Luis Cadena, a language interpreter and participant navigator, the couple shared that Hipolito suffered from dizziness and worry over the cost of his medication and care. Since joining LIFE a year ago,

though, he reports that the dizziness has waned and he no longer feels boredom at home or stress about his health. Instead he's spending time with friends like Miguel and Amber. And he's exercising in the LIFE gym, which reminds him of his days as a long distance runner and, more recently, a mall walker.

"We are managing these individuals' well-being, both socially and medically," Dickson said. "Instead of sitting on the couch at home, they are more active. Those little aches and pains, they aren't thought about as often. And participants are around this health care team ... it's interdisciplinary. They're building trusting relationships."

Dickson said that participants who are eating well, engaged socially and observed are less likely to need medical attention at a hospital. And, when they do go, he said they're less likely to be readmitted.

"Our admission and readmission rate for this population is statistically lower than if they weren't in a PACE program," he said. "Hospitals right now have 10 percent to 12 percent readmission rate within 30 days of discharge. Ours is about three percent."

## THE CATHOLIC COMPONENT

The St. Joseph of the Pines LIFE program has about 268 participants and 100 employees who represent a number of faith traditions. Catholic principles - such as service to the poor, fiscal responsibility and strengthening of the family, are a clear part of the program according to Dr. Robert Deucher, medical director.

"In delivering healthcare to the poor, but within the context of the family unit, we do it more efficiently than many other models of health care," he said.

For Msgr. Stephen Worsley, director of mission

## FAST FACTS

### PACE:

Program for all-inclusive care of the elderly. PACE is the program name recognized by the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services

### LIFE:

Living independently for elders. LIFE is the term St. Joseph of the Pines and Trinity Health assigned to the PACE programs they operate.

Nationally, there are 119 PACE programs in 31 states.

North Carolina has 12 PACE sites.

The St. Joseph of the Pines LIFE program is the largest single PACE provider in North Carolina.

And with 25 participants who are veterans, it's the largest national provider of PACE to vets.

PACE draws from five counties: Cumberland, Hoke and (portion of) Moore, Robeson and Harnett.

outreach at St. Joseph of the Pines, what makes LIFE special is that it offers those who have limited resources the opportunity to do what others with more resources might choose to do. “They are able to stay at home longer and still have all the support resources they would need,” he said.

Dignity for every human person may be seen, for example, in the way employee Taylor Whittenton helps someone in the gym or carefully handles a participant’s bag of personal belongings. Participants have choices – from meal selections to where to sit and what to do. And dignity is present even in a small, private section of the building – the shower room.

For some participants, a shower at home is a daunting task when physical challenges are present. Remodeling a bathroom to accommodate for those challenges is often too expensive. Showers at home may be uncomfortable or even dangerous. But, at LIFE, the situation is created to be different.

“Depending on their physical function they can sit or stand ... we even have a stretcher,” Dickson said about showers. Staff are present to wash clothes, help with bathing and assist participants who need help changing into clean outfits. A cubby-lined wall with clear bags of clothes and tiny travel bottles of shampoo, conditioner and liquid soap tell the story of just how many participants seek warm showers at LIFE.

## THE FACILITY

One thing that’s striking is how many windows are inside the building. There are windows to the outside, but there are windows from rooms into hallways and windows from employee areas to participant areas.

There are three large dayrooms where people eat, socialize and even sew. A fourth dayroom is smaller and caters to those with cognitive impairments. A health treatment room provides a space for participants to have their blood sugar checked, dressings changed or meds given in a private atmosphere.

There’s a free space that’s not staffed where participants may create art, do puzzles or take a nap in one of the recliners.

A landscaped courtyard offers participants a place to sit outside, garden and listen to a nearby water feature. There’s a grill, too, for special occasions. In addition to the gym, a large room offers a space for physical therapy and occupational therapy for those who need it.

Participants have access to an on-site library run by a local bookmobile. And a Snoezelen room is dedicated to the senses. With green



dots on the wall, carpet samples for touch and aromatherapy, it’s a space where recreational therapists work with participants.

A doctor’s office – with triage area, sick room and exam rooms – completes the facility. “When people enroll in [LIFE/PACE], we are their provider,” Dickson said. “We are their pharmacy.”

## RECEIVING. GIVING

For participant Steve Hartsock, 58, life was “boring” before the program. Between a stomach hernia and knee pain, he said he often felt uncomfortable. Today Hartsock, who lives at home with his wife, exercises, does puzzles and creates soft caps on a loom for chemotherapy patients and anyone who asks for one.

“They do a lot of prayer here. It puts me at ease,” he added, noting a weekly Catholic communion service he takes part in. “Me, myself, I think they’re helping me a lot. They’re here for you.”

Irene Girouard is one of the Eucharistic ministers from Saint Patrick Parish in Fayetteville who visits LIFE for the Communion service, which includes prayer and readings from the previous Sunday’s Gospel.

“It’s a relatively new program for us,” she said. “[The participants] are so grateful and they absolutely beam. If we arrive late, they say, ‘we were waiting for you!’”

Girouard said they hold the short service in the on-site chapel, and that participants often stay afterward and talk. “It’s like anything else: When you help someone else it helps you more. It’s a blessing,” she said.



The data shows that residents who are in a program like this live longer and have a higher satisfaction than those trying to be at home, where oftentimes the family is gone to work in the daytime.”



– Msgr. Stephen C. Worsley, director of mission outreach, St. Joseph of the Pines