

# Living with INTEGRITY

Pilgrim Place, an “intentional” community in Southern California, has taken healthy living to a whole new level. **By Paula Story**

In the Southern California foothills, on 32 lush acres dotted with citrus, avocado and charming stucco buildings with red tile roofs, a community of energetic residents gathers for lunch. They discuss politics, religion, global warming, sustainability, peace, war and the latest films or novels. And food; they love to talk about food.

Was it grown locally? Is it organic? Does it come from sustainable sources? What is the protein/fat/fiber ratio? Is it fresh and savory?

Pilgrim Place, in Claremont, Southern Calif., is not your typical retirement community. In fact, it's called an *intentional* community. Residents and staff here celebrate health and wellness and are intent on living physically, intellectually, spiritually, vocationally and socially active lives.

Formed 90 years ago as a place for retired or furloughed missionaries, Pilgrim Place residents still come from a background of religious or charitable non-profit

organizations. They are progressive thinkers who volunteer, recycle, compost and gather twice each week around a flagpole to pray for world peace and justice.

“They are activists, and they are very involved in all that we do,” Steve Rogers, Vice President, Campus Services, says. “I think we are on the cutting edge of so many things. Our residents are very engaged; they're very involved in what is going on – not only here in the community but globally. They really are progressive and they push staff to be on the cutting edge. They don't just sit back and take what's given to them.”



So you might expect that when Morrison partnered with Pilgrim Place to oversee food services, the residents had some suggestions and requests. They wanted local products purchased to support family farms. They wanted wild and unfarmed seafood from sustainable sources. They wanted promotion of humane, cage-free eggs; poultry and pork produced without routine use of antibiotics; milk free of artificial growth hormones; waste reduction practices to minimize environmental impact; food packaging made from renewable resources instead of Styrofoam;

and fair trade coffee options. Turns out, Morrison was a great fit for Pilgrim Place, because the company also believes in providing local, sustainable, nutritious food as well as adoption of responsible food practices.

“There's a lot of concern here from a standpoint of both health and trying to eat with ecological integrity,” says Bill Moremen, a longtime resident and co-chair of the Pilgrim Place Dining Services Board. “Are residents leading the charge toward nutrition, sustainability and overall wellness? It's more collaborative now, but earlier

that was probably the case. From time to time, we would put quite a bit of pressure on the administration and the dining services staff to make some changes. With Morrison coming here, we now feel that we have a really good ally.”

Moremen, a pastor who served in five churches, including in the inner city of Los Angeles and downtown Washington, D.C., moved to Pilgrim Place with his wife nearly 11 years ago; he is now 81 years old. Like most people here, they're socially and physically active, and are dedicated walkers who log 20 to 25 miles each week. Other residents swim, hike, practice yoga or tai chi or participate in several activities.

“There are people here who have worked all over the world, so our conversations are rich with experience and points of view,” Moremen says. “When you talk about health and wellness here, it's all encompassing, it's mental, physical, nutritional and spiritual. There are a number of avenues for exercising, you might say, all those dimensions of wellness.” ■

## STEPPING UP TO THE CHALLENGE

Residents aren't the only ones living healthily at Pilgrim Place. With the help of Morrison, the dining services staff has taken huge steps – literally – to improve their own health and wellness. Last fall, the dining management group wore pedometers as part of a national step-counting

contest called *Morrison on the Move*. Other health and wellness contests followed, including the *Less Waist* challenge in which 13 Pilgrim Place management and staff lost



65 pounds over a 12-week period. “One person only lost four pounds, but her blood sugar and blood pressure came down, and she continues to walk two-and-a-half miles three days a week – and she's 65 years old,” Rhonda Ray, director of dining services, says. “It's been incredible; the contest is over, but every

participant wants to continue at least another 12 weeks in measuring their weight on a weekly basis.”

Dining services has also introduced the *Meeting Well* program to encourage healthy foods at business and staff meetings. There isn't a single deep-fat fryer on the whole Pilgrim Place campus.



Wellness, in its various forms, is an integral part of the residents' day-to-day lives at Pilgrim Place.

### A focus on organic food

Many residents grow their own fruit and vegetables on garden plots. Each week, the community hosts “Green Wednesday,” in which the salad bar items and other meal ingredients are local, organic – or often both.

### Volunteering time

Most residents participate in the annual Pilgrim Festival in November – which brings about 10,000 people from the local community on campus for crafts, displays, food, recycled items and a Pilgrim play.

### Communal eating

An unofficial “rule” of the community is that everybody assembles for the noon meal. Random, computer-selected seating assures exciting new conversations and meal companions each day. Assisted living and long-term care residents are encouraged to join the group.

### Learning fitness

Onsite fitness instructors hold frequent lecture panels on the subjects of fitness and nutrition. Regular blood pressure screenings are conducted for residents and a more family or neighborhood like feel is being created in the health center.

**MAIN PHOTO:** Residents at Pilgrim Place in Southern California have helped shape the community's menu and eating habits.