



M a k i n g

that would have perceived value to our consumers."

Researching the future To help the company with its direction, Howard hired a research firm out of Boston to evaluate the attractiveness of wellness and fitness programs among the senior segment of the population. "They came back to us and said we should really look at fitness," he says. "[Fitness] was, and still is, exploding among the 55-plus group. Findings showed a 379% increase in the number of people aged 55 and older who joined health clubs between 1987 and 2000. The senior fitness market was projected to be a \$1 billion market with substantial growth potential as more pre- and post- World War II children move into their senior years."

The excitement this research created led Kohlberg and Howard to interview some of the top fitness and wellness consultants in the industry to gain greater insight and help with Kisco's direction. "We ended up choosing Jan Montague, president of Montague, Eippert and Associates," says Howard. "Her concept of whole-person wellness and her focus on the six dimensions of wellness were consistent with our concept of what wellness should be."

Once Kisco made the decision to move ahead with this strategy, there was no turning back.

"We rolled out this program to help differentiate us from other communities," says Howard. To ensure their success, he and Montague met with each community's executive director and

In July 2001, Bert Morrow, Kisco's Healthy Strides spokesperson, took home a silver medal in the hurdles, and made it to the finals in both the 100-meter and 200-meter sprints at the 14th World Veterans' Athletic Championships in Brisbane, Australia. Morrow, 89, is a world-record hurdler and Senior Olympics gold medallist.

Kisco Senior Living commits to enhanced health and wellness of residents

In a crowded marketplace, how does a company differentiate itself? This was the challenge facing Andy Kohlberg and Terry Howard of Kisco Senior Living, when they sat down to refine a strategic plan. Kohlberg, Kisco's president and CEO, and Howard, executive vice president, began by analyzing the industry. "A key characteristic of our industry is the similarity of products and services offered," says Howard. "This led Andy and I to ask the following three questions:

- How can we differentiate ourselves from our key competitors?
- What trends are surfacing in the marketplace today, not only for the seniors that we now serve, but also for those we may serve in the future?
- What are the emerging preferences of these groups?

"We were looking at preparing for the future," Howard continues, "by creating new products and services

h e a l t h y s t r i d e s



Abbotswood at Irving Park in Greensboro, North Carolina

key management staff. Howard says, "Jan presented the concept of the Healthy Strides program. She discussed what it would mean to them and to their community, and what the whole-person wellness model actually meant. We literally got buy-in at each property. Jan gave them a detailed workbook to complete over the next four to five months, which contained the general standards for the program. We allowed each property to customize its program." This, in turn, fostered a sense of ownership.

"During the strategic planning phase, we also assessed whether we should charge for the programs and open them up to the public," says Howard. "We decided not to charge initially and to focus on our primary target: the residents. However, we strongly encourage family members and associates to use the centers." According to Howard, Kisco's long-term plans include offering the wellness program to non-resident seniors in selected markets.

Staffing the centers
Once the concept of Healthy Strides was created, the next step for Kisco and Montague was to hire the right people to deliver the program. "Jan

helped us create a profile of the ideal candidate," says Howard. What were the qualifications? "The ideal candidate should have a health and fitness background, with a professional accreditation from the American College of Sports Medicine or, preferably, a masters in sports medicine or other health and fitness-related designations." One final qualification: the person must have a passion for working with seniors.

"We set out to hire a Healthy Strides director for each property," says Howard, "giving them the responsibility for the success of his or her program." He continues, "We also gave them opportunities that seemed more attractive than the conditions they faced in a typical fitness center. By this, I mean our facilities offered a more team-oriented environment and provided opportunities to experience immediate gratification with each resident."

Another feather in Kisco's cap when recruiting the new staff was the value the company places on its associates, which creates a family-like feeling. Howard believes this is a distinct competitive advantage.

Launching the program
From the outset, Kisco's primary objectives with the Healthy Strides program were twofold:

- To differentiate the company in a crowded industry; and
- To offer residents and their families a way to improve their lives.

To achieve these objectives, Kisco made a significant investment in

Words of advice for newcomers

- Find someone who is knowledgeable in senior fitness or wellness to help you.
- Stay focused. Determine whom you are trying to serve, what segment you're catering to, and learn as much as you can from research and focus groups. Then create programs specifically for that market.
- Always ask yourself, How can I improve it? Then keep selling the story of what you're doing to as many people as you can.

senior-friendly exercise equipment to outfit their facilities.

The company began the marketing for the program when it engaged noted gerontologist Kelly Ferrin, author of *What's age got to do with it?* In her book, Ferrin chronicles 100 "super seniors"—one of whom is Bert Morrow, a world-class hurdler, who has won numerous gold medals in the Senior Olympics. A meeting was arranged with the 89 year-old Morrow and Ferrin. After talking to both, Howard and Kohlberg were convinced they had found the ideal spokespersons for the Healthy Strides program.

"[We didn't have] someone younger trying to convince people in their 80s about the virtues and benefits of exercise," says Howard. "We had someone their age introducing the

Making healthy stride *Continued from page 37*

Kisco Senior Living is a privately held company that manages and develops full-service rental retirement communities nationwide. Kisco recently acquired the senior living assets of Transamerica Corporation, a subsidiary of AEGON, N.V. As a result, the company nearly doubled in size to 3,400 units and 24 properties in California, Nevada, Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia and Florida. Visit Kisco on the web at www.kiscosl.com

program." Kisco's strategy proved effective. According to Howard, "In just 15 months, we enrolled more than 600 people in the program at nine facilities—375 are what we call frequent users."

So how's the program doing? "It's important to keep in mind that Healthy Strides is in its infancy," says Howard. "The early returns from those who attended the roll-out, the families and residents, have been very positive. Family members notice a difference in the attitudes and overall general health of those participating in [Healthy Strides]. That's a key outcome of the program."

Howard intends to monitor and assess Healthy Strides' usage and value, as it relates to Kisco's overall offerings, and to identify how it rates as a key attribute. After interviewing Kisco's executive directors and program participants, Howard says the initial response has been encouraging. "They say this program has been making a difference in the selection process," he adds. He considers it a good start.

The outlook for the future With Kisco a few years into its new strategy, how does the company view its position in the industry now? "We believe the Healthy Strides program gives us an advantage over our competitors," says Howard. He also believes "what Kisco currently offers will be a basic attribute, or expectation of the market, within two to three years. If you don't have something like it, you'll be at a distinct disadvantage; if you do, you'll just be showing up to play."

If Howard's prediction is right, he thinks it "will force companies like Kisco to become more innovative, based on customer feedback and response." But what could this mean in real terms?

"Taking it to the next level will require [Kisco] to further integrate wellness into the overall community services and amenities," says Howard. "This means innovative programming to better address the dimensions beyond just the physical one. These dimensions include vocational, intellectual, social, spiritual and emotional. Kisco is currently looking at the required resources to successfully execute the plan."

Obstacles for the future

- Converting non-participants to active lifestyles (Read "Speaking their language" on page 13 to discover more about this topic.)
- Ensuring the participants you have keep using your facilities



"This exercise program has really helped me. When I started taking the exercise, I could not put on socks or tie shoestrings. Now I can do both, and I plan to continue with the program."

Louise Howell, age 88



Vision

[Our] vision is to grow as a unique and enduring company dedicated to meeting the changing needs of our residents and their families. To create a collaborative environment where associates are appreciated and inspired to develop as individuals, where strengths and abilities are nurtured and rewarded. A company of high quality retirement communities and services delivered with a warm and friendly feeling. We are committed to responsible growth, operational excellence and superior financial results.

Principles, values and beliefs

We are committed to exemplary service delivered with integrity, dignity and compassion. Our communities for seniors are distinguished by warm, secure and friendly environments.

We will enhance each resident's lifestyle by:

- Offering high quality, creatively designed programs;
- Responding immediately to residents' needs and concerns;
- Encouraging independence;
- Promoting a sense of community and friendship.

We, the staff, are committed to:

- Teamwork;
- Continuous improvement;
- Open communication;
- Fostering a learning environment;
- Being professional;
- Profitability.

We live by a standard of conduct which encompasses honesty, accountability, personal development and a passion for excellence.

Program's success with residents

In August 2000, Kisco introduced the Healthy Strides program to the residents of Abbotswood at Irving Park in Greensboro, North Carolina. After six months, here's what some residents had to say:

Doris H. Brown, age 87

"The daily exercise in the wellness center is most helpful in keeping limber and all over healthy. I especially enjoy the stretching equipment."

Jean Pence, age 75

"I think the program is excellent. When I miss the exercises for a week, I can really tell the difference in how my osteoarthritic hip moves. This is what I looked for when first coming to Abbotswood!"

Carolyn Poole, age 83

"The wellness program at Abbotswood is my favorite activity—well supervised, the best equipment, freedom of choice—the works! Keep it up!" ▼