



Health-care heroes

Tibetan bell massage. Nordic walking. Zumba aerobics with a Latin beat. You might not expect to find these kinds of activities in your average nursing home, but staffers at an Italian facility have found they're a good way to overcome the residents' summer doldrums.

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The dedicated workers in nursing homes seldom receive recognition for their heroic everyday efforts. To address this situation, SCA in Italy has sponsored a "Passion to Assist" contest every other year since 2010 to recognize the unsung heroes of the health-care system.

The contest was born from the realization that caregivers in nursing homes work in a demanding environment and face unique challenges, yet are seldom recognized for their achievements. SCA decided to correct this oversight by calling attention to the innovative activities they have developed.

"We wanted to highlight the day-to-day passion they bring to their jobs," explains Antonio Campanile, marketing manager, SCA.

THE ITALIAN MARKETING team brainstormed in 2010 and came up with the idea of a contest that would celebrate the creative spirit of caregivers. They called their initiative "The Passion to Assist" and invited SCA's 800 nursing home customers in Italy to participate.

Contests have been held in alternate years since then, each with a different theme. The 2014 edition

highlighted the theme "Actively" and focused on three areas: food, fitness and art.

The Villa Santa Teresa retirement home at Bagno a Ripoli, in greater Florence, won for a cookbook based on traditional recipes contributed by residents. Because it was a team effort, everyone was involved - residents, staff, relatives and friends.

ANOTHER WINNER was ISRAA (Istituto per Servizi di Ricovero e Assistenza agli Anziani, or the Institute for Services of Hospital and Elderly Care), based in Treviso, in northern Italy. ISRAA proposed a "WeFitness" program for its 200 residents, engaging them in physical and mental fitness during the hot and often lonely summer months - hence the Nordic walking and Zumba aerobics. "We encourage the concept of active aging and solidarity with our residents and the community at large," explains Maria Aurora Uliana, coordinator of the institute.

Equally innovative was an art project called "Stories of the Past" developed by Magiera Ansaloni, a nursing home operator in Rio Saliceto, northwest of Bologna. It consists of a series of collages put together by the 150 residents of Magiera





→ Ansaloni's three nursing homes. One set of collages focused on marriage, another on childhood toys and shoes, a third on the lives of workers in the region's rice fields, and another on nursery rhymes in local dialect.

"Our residents live partly in the past, and these memories make them smile," says Patrizia Barbieri, who spearheaded the project.

"Something that evokes the past is positive for them, so they can share their memories with family and friends. The collages are a thread connecting the past to the present."

THE FIRST CONTEST, in 2010, drew an enthusiastic response. Out of entries submitted by more than 200 individuals, an independent panel of judges selected three winners. All projects were published in a book distributed after the awards ceremony.

For the second version in 2012, SCA chose the theme of

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"sustainability." Submissions came from nursing homes rather than individuals this time, and two winners were selected.

"Given the theme, it didn't make sense to print a hardcover book," says Campanile, so all projects were posted online instead.

Winners were featured in newsletters and other company materials. The 2014 contest rewarded the winner of each of its three categories with a coupon to spend in support of its programs.

Details for the next contest in 2016 have yet to be announced, but Campanile promises that it will be the most exciting edition ever. ■

THE PASSION TO ASSIST

"The Passion to Assist" is a contest focusing on the creativity and enthusiasm that nursing home caregivers bring to their work. Held every two years, the contest is open to SCA nursing home customers in Italy. The contest criteria are announced early in the year, three outside judges select the winners in June, and the awards ceremony is held in the autumn.

Participation in the first three contests has been high: more than 200 individuals submitted projects in 2010; 110 nursing homes participated in 2012; and 255 projects from 200 facilities were evaluated in 2014.

The program's success has been noted elsewhere in Europe. Spain launched its first "Pasión de asistir" in 2013, and the winner received a trip to Italy, including a visit with one of Italy's winners from 2012 happily located in the picturesque city of Verona.

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