



by *Dion Sena*
FHCA President

Treasuring 'Treasure Our Elders'

A great program that began with a simple idea

It was only about a year ago that the original idea for FHCA's "Treasure Our Elders" outreach program sprang from a discussion among members of FHCA's Consumer Relations Committee. Committee chairman Michael Alexander, FHCA staff liaison Debbie Afasano and other committee members got to thinking after seeing TV commercials that said Florida's treasures are its pristine beaches, diverse wildlife and other natural beauty. They respectfully disagreed. Our elderly are our state's true treasures, they said, and they were right. Many of today's elderly literally helped build our state. We should honor their many contributions.



The group created "Treasure Our Elders," an umbrella theme that emphasized the greatness of our elderly and our obligation to provide for their care. TOE later became a powerful internal morale builder and was very helpful in furthering facilities' external community outreach efforts.

Our members and others got behind "Treasure Our Elders" and things began to take off in ways we didn't expect:

- The first official "Caring for Our State's Treasures Day" was proclaimed by Gov. Jeb Bush for February 15, 2005. The proclamation recognizes those residing in long term care facilities and those who care for them
- Individual facilities across Florida purchased quantities of "Treasure Our Elders" badges, buttons and T-shirts. During the legislative session, Family Forum members and other nursing home advocates proudly wore their TOE regalia
- Facilities and other elder care providers downloaded the "Treasure Our Elders" pledge cards in which signers affirm eight promises to respect the lifetime contributions and dignity of the elderly. Facilities adopted the TOE theme for "open house" and other community events.
- Full-length biographies of treasured elders who live in FHCA member nursing homes appeared regularly in monthly issues of FHCA *Pulse*. Each story demonstrated how the person made contributions — big and small — from which we all benefit today.
- "Treasure Our Elders" was suggested to the American Health Care Association as a theme for this year's National Nursing Home Week celebrations

You can be sure we'll continue "Treasure Our Elders" activities throughout 2006.

Treasuring our friends

In addition to the frail elderly we serve, we also treasure those who help us in our work. There are many such groups, but chief among them are the Florida members of AARP. You'll recall AARP's assistance was invaluable in securing the landmark SB 1202 legislation in 2001. AARP and FHCA were among the first organizations to remind legislators that any Medicaid reform efforts must focus on quality improvement, not just cost savings. We'll look forward to working with AARP during the coming legislative session.

We also treasure all those groups who are at the frontlines of elder care: the nurses, CNAs, physicians, therapists, social workers, activity directors, dietary managers, ombudsman volunteers, Family Forum members, clergy and all the others who help improve both the quality of care and the quality of life in our facilities.

I have no doubt that 2006 will be another challenging year for us, which is why having unity of purpose is so important. It's equally important that we work hard to accomplish our goals. President Dwight D. Eisenhower said it: "Before all else, we seek, upon our common labor as a nation, the blessings of Almighty God. And the hopes in our hearts fashion the deepest prayers of our whole people. May we pursue the right — without self-righteousness. May we know unity — without conformity. May we grow in strength — without pride in self. May we, in our dealings with all people of the earth, ever speak truth and serve justice."

Note to FHCA *Pulse* readers

In addition to all FHCA members and associate members, FHCA *Pulse* is also mailed to legislators, opinion leaders, reporters and state/federal regulators in Florida. The wider distribution allows others to better understand long term care and the daily challenges faced by the long term care providers we represent.

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