



Loren Ranaletta, right, oversees Episcopal SeniorLife, which has grown through many buildings over the years.



Photos courtesy ESLC

ESLC: 150 years of innovative senior care

By VELVET SPICER

When Loren Ranaletta joined Episcopal SeniorLife Communities in 1984, he intended to stay five years. Three decades later, he's still there.

"I was No. 2 at a very large facility as the chief operating officer and I just wanted to run my own place," Ranaletta said of his move from Monroe Community Hospital to president and CEO of ESLC. "I said to the board, in five years I'll run out of things to do."

He laughs now at his early naiveté, but it also is clear that he delights in his job, is passionate about the industry and has no intention of leaving anytime soon. It's a testament to ESLC's history, as well as evidence of what its future holds.

ESLC was founded as the Episcopal Church Home 150 years ago by a group

of women volunteers from parishes across Rochester. The Church Home's purpose was to help orphan children, as well as an emerging population of unwed women and women who were left behind as their husbands headed west.

"The motivation of the women was really to use their basis in faith to reach out and help the community," Ranaletta said.



McGinness

In June 1868, the women volunteers were given a farm and farmhouse at 505 Mt. Hope Ave., the current home of ESLC, and by July of that year it was filled.

"The farmhouse was always somewhat of a temporary housing, knowing that this was going to expand because

there was such a need in the Rochester area," said Courtney McGinness, vice president of community outreach at ESLC. "So they started fundraising almost immediately."

In order to fundraise, the women needed a group of male trustees who would work on the business affairs on behalf of the board of lady managers, as the women were known, McGinness noted. A new stone building that housed between 40 and 50 children was built that same year.

"It was built through donations by people in the Episcopal parish, and also the contents, the furnishings (were donated)," Ranaletta said. "That was the spirit of the times. What you had that you didn't need you shared."

The stone building remained an orphanage until the mid-1930s. In 1937 a fire damaged the building and safe-

ty concerns, as well as an outcropping of other children's homes in the area, prompted the Church Home to transform the home into one that served elderly men and women.

"It was a home for the infirm and aged," Ranaletta said. "The women of the Episcopal churches were always caregivers here. They would always come, whether it was cooking meals or buying supplies or bringing linens. It was really the spirit of the church women who carried on the residents."

By the end of World War II, it had become evident that people were living longer, and those with disabilities were living longer.

"What we began to see is not only did people need a place to live, but now they needed support," Ranaletta noted. "They couldn't cook anymore. They weren't able to make their beds and do all the things that they used to do. So that just began another whole transition that it was almost becoming more than a volunteer group of people could really manage."

In the early 1960s the men's board of trustees merged with the women's board of managers and the Church Home began to position itself as a care facility.

"The whole thing came together in the mid-1960s with Medicare and Medicaid being legislated," Ranaletta said. "Then you have government funding insurance for the elderly that really began the whole transition of the organization to healthcare."

In 1963, the Church Home hired its first paid administrator, Rockwood Jenkins, who had come from Albany with a background in social agency management after founding the Schenectady Boys Club.

"I would describe Mr. Jenkins as the 'father' of the whole organization, whether they were the residents or they were the staff or they were former employees. He really was a patriarch who cared about everyone," Ranaletta said. "He carried forth what you would call that nurturing spirit that the women had founded the organization for."

But Jenkins wasn't much for fundraising or making hard business decisions, Ranaletta said, so Frank Allen was brought in to work in tandem with Jenkins as president of the organization's board of directors.

"The whole mindset was, 'if we need

something I'll make five calls—we'll find donors in the community to support us, (and) you, Mr. Jenkins, take care of the daily lives of the people and make it a wonderful experience,'" Ranaletta said.

In 1967, the Church Home built another facility on its Mt. Hope Avenue property in order to bring 24-hour skilled nursing care to its clients. The building is situated behind where the original stone house that was burned in the 1930s stood near the corner of the property. The house remained there until the 1970s when it was removed.

In 1972, the Church Home again ran out of space and designed a two-floor expansion to the new three-story skilled nursing center. When it was discovered that that idea was cost-prohibitive, the home built another facility adjacent to the skilled nursing home. The newest building featured private rooms with private baths for elderly individuals who did not need much care.

In 1983, the church home opened on the property the Chapel of the Good Shepherd, known as the "Heart of the Home." The following year Jenkins retired and Ranaletta arrived.

Ranaletta ushered in a new era of growth that continues today. The Episcopal Church Home's timeline is dotted with a dozen or more strategic moves made by its leadership to enhance offerings and expand its footprint, serving more people.

From 1984 until the early 1990s the Church Home spent a lot of time answering the question, "What are we doing?"

"We formed a foundation. We formed a housing company. We started to look at how to position the corporation for growth with corporate changes so that we could be contemporary in the emerging healthcare marketplace," Ranaletta recalled.

In 1992 Rochester area hospitals were overloaded; some 420 people or more were in the region's five hospitals in what was considered skilled nursing settings. Most were Medicaid recipients and many of them had dementia.

"In the early 1990s, organizations were not equipped to deal with cognitive impairment. Those people used to be in the psych center or some other place," Ranaletta explained. "In 1994 we built the fourth floor with the express purpose that 25 or 30 percent of

the admissions would be these Medicaid people backed up in hospitals. ... We were actually going to provide the community with support for one of the biggest problems that they had."

Three years later, Episcopal Church Home opened its first housing addition, a task that was easier said than done.

"When you're trying to convince a board that you should build housing on your campus because you own the land, it wasn't what you call an immediate approval," Ranaletta recalled with a smile.

But approval was given and the Church Home got to work designing a beautiful, five-story building with underground parking. But when the bids came back they blew him away, Ranaletta said.

"We spent all this money to design and engineer the building and got all the city approvals and it was for naught," he said. "We couldn't do it. It wasn't economically feasible. We were learning on the fly."

Instead, the Church Home scaled the project back and built a 49-unit, three-story building that would become River Edge Manor, an independent living community on the Mt. Hope Avenue campus. The home had 110 reservations as builders were breaking ground.

During the late 1990s, the Church Home ran an adult day program, centers at which adult children could drop off their parents while they ran errands or worked. As a component of early dementia care, the program was funded with grants early on. But when the dollars ran out and there were no public funds to support the program, the home was forced to close the centers. It was the home's first, but not last, foray into neighborhood programs.

Healthcare was evolving quickly, and ESLC was keeping up. Thirteen months after opening River Edge Manor, the organization completed its Center for Rehabilitation on the same campus.

"What was beginning to happen is that the nursing homes were becoming transitional care units and it was another way for hospitals to move people out, past their acute phase when they weren't ready to come home," Ranaletta explained. "So that was a response to a different need, but it was the last piece of this land that we could develop. So 1998 absolutely completed the Mt. Hope campus."

The following year, ESLC opened Brentland Woods, an assisted living

community that was its first off-campus site. The Henrietta property it occupies was purchased from St. Peter's Episcopal Church.

In 2000, the Episcopal Church Home rebranded to Episcopal SeniorLife Communities as a way of embracing all of its programs and services.



Russell

"The organization has always worked to be the resource for senior housing and services in the area," board member Kim Russell said. "Loren has continued to be involved in state and national-level think

tanks on senior living and services that I think have informed how we deliver those services here in Rochester."

Russell said ESLC has an established team of individuals who are thought leaders in their fields.

In 2002, ESLC purchased property from a church in Gates and opened Seabury Woods, a community consisting of patio homes, assisted living and memory care.

"Seabury Woods was the very first project where we bought the land, designed it and built it from scratch," Ranaletta said. "And when we built Seabury Woods, we were the first in the state to license enriched housing for memory care."

By 2005, ESLC was receiving recognition awards from various community organizations including the Alzheimer's Association, Rochester Educational Opportunity Center and ArcWorks.



Barr

"I've known Loren for about 35 years, and over those years I've come to understand and know that he's got an excellent reputation in this community and throughout the state, as well as (being) an

outstanding and accomplished leader in senior care," ESLC board chairman John Barr said. Ranaletta has surrounded himself with an outstanding leadership team that has been instrumental in the organization's growth.

"The organization has grown its footprint across greater Rochester and has done so in a financially sustainable

way," Barr said.

In 2012, Ranaletta and ESLC stepped outside the box and launched its first neighborhood program in Henrietta.

"This is different from adult day care," Ranaletta said. "Daisy Marquis Jones Foundation was exceedingly supportive of the concept of working with people in neighborhoods and giving them a social structure, a hot meal if that's what they needed. An exercise program turned out to be one of the most exceptional parts of it."

The neighborhood program—ESLC now has six in various communities around Rochester—is designed to cater to elderly individuals in certain neighborhoods, particularly those in danger of making poor judgment calls.

"The strategy that Loren and the leadership have created is different than most. Their strategy, in part, is to reach out to the communities where we currently have facilities and create a very strong neighborhood program that invites the neighborhood population to come in and enjoy health and wellness programs, educational programs and services," Barr said. "This is unusual, to reach beyond the four walls of those buildings and to invite the neighbors to partake in various services the residents themselves enjoy. And there will be more of that."

In 2013, ESLC opened its first affordable apartments for seniors. Beatrice Place is a former Catholic church and school in the Town of Greece that has been converted to 73 apartments. Rockwood Center, which offers independent senior apartments, is located in Henrietta near Brentland Woods.

The following year, ESLC took over Valley Manor, a struggling community of custom apartment homes and assisted living. Built around 1970, Valley Manor was the first entry-fee retirement program for wealthier people.



Marcello

"We invested immediately about \$1.5 million into the building's core services," said Lisa Marcello, ESLC executive vice president and CFO, noting that assimilating the two cultures

proved to be somewhat difficult. "It was the first venture that took an existing

structure and culture and organization and we thought they'll just fit right in. And it doesn't work like that."

Still, the two cultures did mesh and ESLC quickly turned the business around and filled up the building.

"We were not on the acquisition trail," Ranaletta said. "We were really trying to understand what was working for our peers and what was not working and then that ultimately became an opportunity for us. It was a learning experience."

In 2015, ESLC acquired Pinehurst, an independent living community in Honeoye Falls that offers a media room, a lounge, guest accommodations and more.



Spencer

"We're in the forefront of what senior care is going to need to be in the future, and I love that about the home," board member Susie Spencer said. "Loren is always thinking ahead. Sometimes when

people have been around for a long time they get stuck in doing it the same way. Not Loren. We have to sort of sit on him sometimes because he's always coming up with a new idea, a new way to do things, and that's terrific."

ESLC at the moment is close to closing on the purchase of a 45-unit affordable senior living project in Genesee that is currently owned by an Episcopal church. A second project involves a partnership with Home Leasing LLC in Penfield for a memory care and assisted living facility on Route 250 near the YMCA of Greater Rochester.

"The conceptual design and all the zoning requirements have been met on paper and now it just becomes a question of what's workable and not workable," Ranaletta said of the \$13 million project. "That's an exciting project for us. We're really hopeful we might be able to break ground next year."

Episcopal SeniorLife also has partnered with St. Ann's Community on a unique collaboration in which they share the services of the Pillar Medical Group, a geriatric medical practice that serves both organizations throughout the continuum of care.

"People who come to assisted living or memory care—they may only be in that situation for months or a year or two be-



Heppard

fore their underlying problem requires them to move to a nursing home level of care,” said Brian Heppard M.D., ES-LC’s medical director. “Plus, as an older person’s chronic diseases progress and they may need more assistance, that may require them to move to a different level of care.”

The problem with that is the disruptive nature of all of those moves, on both the patient and their family.

“Our goal is to try to minimize that

and provide more continuity,” Heppard said. “We shared a vision of the kind of medical care that we wanted to provide that lined up with the kind of medical care that Episcopal SeniorLife was looking for and their vision for how they see their communities. They really view all of their senior communities as not standalone buildings, but as one large Episcopal SeniorLife community. It’s pretty refreshing.”

McGinness said ESLC’s past has been focused on sustainability and forward thinking in its leadership by asking, “What’s next?” and “How can we help?”

“Of course we’re very focused on offering the very best of services for the

residents that live here, but what is that next need? Where are those gaps and what do we need to do to fill those gaps?” McGinness said. “Seniors right now, they call for a need and deserve respect and dignity, and that gets at the core of what we do. It’s our driving force.”

Added Barr: “For 150 years we’ve been in business. You can’t stay in business for that period of time in the nonprofit sector without having strong donors, strong volunteers, strong staff, strong leadership, a strong board, a very strong CEO and strategies that have worked over 150 years.”

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