

## Issaquah rehab center leaps from one star to five

June 7, 2011

By Laura Geggel



Lisa Stubenrauch, Issaquah Nursing & Rehabilitation administrator, helped bring the center from one star to five in three years. By Laura Geggel

When Lisa Stubenrauch took over at the Issaquah Nursing & Rehabilitation Center in 2008, it only had a one-star rating from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

Three years later, it has five stars; the top rating a center can receive.

In Washington, only 36 out of 229 nursing and rehabilitation facilities received a five-star rating.

The journey to the high rating was not easy. The center has passed through many owners and many names since it opened in 1964 at 805 Front St. S.

It passed through several hands. It changed its name from Issaquah Care Center to The Gardens at Issaquah after losing an \$8 million lawsuit in 2005. A woman who lived there had to have an arm and a leg amputated, and all of her teeth removed because of negligent care.

In 2007, North American Healthcare began managing the center, and shortly after, Stubenrauch took the steering wheel.\

Stubenrauch has a background in nursing as well as administration. When North American Healthcare administrators offered her the job, she thought long and hard. Transforming the center would take at least 60 to 80 hours per week, six days a week for a year and a half, she said.

Still, she took the job, and her hard work paid off.

She decided to raise the skill set of her employees so the center could take acute care patients, such as people recovering from hip or knee replacements, broken bones, strokes, cardiac problems, dementia or multiorgan failure.

“The people who are at my nursing home, 20 years ago were at the hospital,” she said.

As the center took on new patients, Stubenrauch examined the level of care they provided, evaluating and replacing all but one of her department heads.

“If they couldn’t raise the bar, they had to move along,” she said.

Stubenrauch and her staff sifted through patient surveys, looking for ways to improve stays at Issaquah Nursing and Rehabilitation, including interior decorations, therapy and physician services, and how to serve food.

Under the center’s former owners, up to three to four patients would share a room. With 70 rooms and a capacity of 126, that number has decreased to one to two patients per room under Stubenrauch’s watch.

The rooms themselves are also receiving an upgrade, with contemporary furniture. Even the light bulbs changed, with the center working with Puget Sound Energy to switch to more efficient lighting.

The center even has two therapy pets — a golden retriever and a Jack Russell terrier.

Realizing that the center would function better if it were part of the community, Stubenrauch joined the Kiwanis Club of Issaquah, and patients who are well enough can go on field trips to theaters, museums, casinos and stores.

Her continuous goal is to change the public’s perceptions. Stubenrauch said she knows the center hasn’t always offered the best care, but it does now.

She recalled one doctor saying the center was a place “I wouldn’t send my dog. And now he’s like, ‘Let’s send patients there,’” she said.

Word of mouth is the best way to spread the word. Families will share their stories or a hospital’s discharge planner calls patients to see what they thought of the rehabilitation center. Often, patients will give a positive response, prompting the hospital to send more patients to Issaquah.

Most short-term patients stay less than 45 days, but some patients living with Alzheimer’s or dementia live there permanently, some for as long as nine years. About half of its patients use Medicaid.

“It’s the ethical thing to do, too,” Stubenrauch said of taking patients who are covered by Medicaid. “People have to receive care.”

### **Attainable goals**

Stubenrauch has more goals in mind. She would like Issaquah Nursing and Rehabilitation to be at capacity — it’s now at 116 out of 126.

The state Department of Social & Health Services performs surveys on nursing homes. In 2010, the DSHS found several deficiencies, such as keeping sound levels comfortable.

Stubenrauch hopes to reduce those deficiencies to zero.

“We hope they’re always looking for ways to improve,” Stephanie Magill, spokeswoman for the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, said. “Our ultimate concern is for safety and concern for the Medicare beneficiaries.”

The center’s overall goal is to increase awareness in Issaquah about the center’s new changes, “to really let the community here in Issaquah know that we have an incredible facility here,” Admissions Director Lynnette Anderson said.

John Whitney, of Issaquah, arrived at the center two years ago with diabetes, depression and a recently amputated leg. A Medicaid patient, Whitney had few choices for where to spend his rehabilitation, but the Issaquah facility ended up being a good match. He became resident president and began organizing field trips.

“They got me so healthy and they do everything for you here,” he said. “They taught me empathy. They made me understand my life isn’t over. They gave me my future back.”

### **What’s the score?**

- Issaquah Nursing and Rehabilitation earned:
- Three out of five stars in health inspections
- Four out of five stars for nursing home staffing
- Five out of five stars for quality measures
- Overall, five out of five stars

Laura Geggel: 392-6434, ext, 241, or lgeggel@isspress.com. Comment at [www.issaquahpress.com](http://www.issaquahpress.com).  
Comment at [www.issaquahpress.com](http://www.issaquahpress.com)