



MADISON AND OAKWOOD VILLAGE Make National News in 1948

BY BETH JOHNSON

If one took a look at the September 6, 1948, issue of *Life* magazine, they might be surprised to see Madison on the cover and in a feature story. *Life*, which at the time had a weekly circulation exceeding 5 million, named Madison “America’s Ideal City.”

For the story, *Life* sent its famed staff photographer Alfred Eisenstaedt to Madison to photograph a 24-year-old mother as the cover’s subject. Jeanne Parr Noth, a Madison West High School graduate and University of Wisconsin–Madison student, was pictured holding her infant son with the accompany-

ing headline “The Good Life in Madison, Wisconsin.”

In celebrating Madison, the *Life* story mentioned the beauty of the lakes, the city’s prosperous economy, and the “steady flow of cultural and youthful ideas” from UW–Madison.

Not far from where the cover photo was shot—in the backyard of Jeanne’s parents’ home—Oakwood Village was founded off Mineral Point Road by a group of congregations that believed “Lutherans in Madison could support a home for the aged.” When successful Madi-

son contractor George Vogel attended St. John’s Church, he was aware of the interest in founding a Lutheran-based retirement home and that land and buildings would be needed to make this dream a reality.

At an auction in 1941, George had acquired the Normandale Sanitarium, a bankrupt rest home that had been owned by a group of physicians. The rest home consisted of six cottages and two buildings (Tabor Lodge and Hebron Hall). Although the 40 acres were too steep for farming or a housing development, the oak-covered hillsides were perfect for rustic

cottages and dormitories. George called his business Oakwood Suburban Hotel Homes, and during the housing shortage of World War II, he rented the cottages and apartments to young families. Then in 1948, he agreed to sell the 40-acre campus to the newly formed Oakwood Lutheran Homes Association for \$80,000—a fraction of its value. The first residents were charged \$60 to \$80 per month for a room.

Oakwood was founded in response to a time of change in the American lifestyle. The years after World War II emphasized a contrast in the lives of many senior citizens between old ways and new. At one time, older individuals could expect to live in the large houses of their relatives with extended family. But now, homes were smaller, and the lifestyles of young, mobile families often left little time for older family members. Both young and old expected more out of life. Improved health, social security, and a longer lifespan helped create the concept of “happy golden years” after retirement, when travel, leisure, companionship, activity, and lifelong learning could be enjoyed for years to come.

As Oakwood responded to this change, it flourished, adding additional buildings to the Oakwood Village University Woods campus on the west side of Madison, and built the Oakwood Village Prairie Ridge campus on Madison’s east side in 2000.



Marcy Turner has worked at Oakwood for 22 years and is now a supervisor in the Life Enrichment Department (formerly the Activity Department). She has seen many changes over the years. “We now offer a wider range of programs to meet more specific and individual needs and interests. ... We increased and improved the number and types of exercise groups and have added the Physical Wellness Department with personalized one-to-one workouts with a trained professional, added music therapy, staff horticulturalists, and have increased the number of life enrichment staff and opportunities that we offer throughout the day and into the evenings.”

Residents now have the opportunity to make more personal choices related to their daily routine and pursuits. They have more dining choices, more outings available, and more control over their own health with improved wellness services on

campus. One of the most attractive changes is that residents now have the option to remain in their independent living apartment longer by bringing in services, such as housekeeping, medication reminders, laundry, and much more, allowing them to age in place.

Today, Oakwood Village serves nearly 1,000 residents between its two campuses and employs more than 800 people. The number of residents Oakwood serves is about to grow this spring as 71 new apartment homes and 33 assisted-living apartments on the Prairie Ridge campus welcome the next generation of newcomers who will call Oakwood home.

Photographs provided by Oakwood Village.

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