



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CONTACT:

Deborah Allen
Grand Traverse Pavilions
Chief Development/Community Engagement Officer
(231) 932-3020
dallen@gtpavilions.org

Despite COVID Pandemic Life Expectancy is Increasing Across the Globe

October 1, 2020 – Traverse City. Today is “International Day of Older Persons.” Across the globe the increasing number of aging adults has never been more relevant than it has been during the COVID pandemic. What many don’t realize is that this is a trend that will continue to be a global health issue for generations to come. World health indicators confirm people are living longer; United Nations projections indicate the current life expectancy for the World in 2020 is 72.63 years (a 0.24% increase from 2019), and in the United States the average life expectancy is 78.93.

Earlier this month the Traverse City Senior Center celebrated more than 300 local residents as part of their annual 90 Over 90 recognition efforts that had to be postponed this year due to COVID. Grand Traverse Pavilions, the region’s largest skilled nursing facility and continuum of care including assisted, independent and rehabilitation services for aging adults, celebrated eighty (80) Nonagenarians among its current residents.

The Pavilions is a public facility, governed by Grand Traverse County Department of Health and Human Services, established by the community in response to the county’s responsibility to care for the health and wellbeing of its most vulnerable residents – frail elderly. The Pavilions mission is “*To provide accessible, trusted and compassionate care that enhances quality of life for aging adults.*” Currently, as many as 88% of the Pavilions residents are either Medicare/Medicaid recipients and the Pavilions has a proud history in recent years of providing more than \$4 million in charity care (in the form of benevolent care/housing scholarships for those unable to pay, as well as, the underwriting of unreimbursed medical care for those served). The Grand Traverse Pavilions Foundation was established in the mid-90’s to manage the Benevolent Care Fund that was created to provide ongoing support for our region’s most vulnerable aging adults who otherwise may not have resources to pay for their care.

Throughout the current pandemic Grand Traverse Pavilions has managed the care of over 350 residents (called residents acknowledging the Pavilions is their home), and it's more than 400 employees, with no active outbreaks of COVID-19. This is in great part due to the swift and ongoing commitment to prevention and safety measures implemented by the Pavilions leadership and direct care staff throughout the pandemic.

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) has implemented the use of the MI Safe Start Map to determine frequency of COVID-19 testing in long-term care organizations in Michigan. Traverse City is part of the Traverse City Region (Region 6) which encompasses sixteen (16) counties in the tip of the mitt and is designated a "medium risk" area on the MI Safe Start Map. Based on the risk levels reported, all facilities are required to conduct weekly COVID testing for staff and if there are any positives, all residents will then be tested weekly until there have been two consecutive weeks with no new positive cases.

Grand Traverse Pavilions was quick to implement daily precautions in response to COVID-19 to ensure the safety of its staff and residents. Safety measures are ongoing, with all staff required to complete a COVID screening and temperature check via a thermal imaging scanner at the start of their shift.

The new screening process was made possible through an *Urgent Need Grant* from the Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation in response to COVID. In addition to the temperature check, staff must complete an electronic symptom questionnaire confirming they have no symptoms associated with the virus, or indicate if they have traveled out of the area. Employees who answer yes for travel must confirm that they have not traveled to a "red" or high risk region as identified by the global epidemics map (reflective of the pandemic over the past 7 days). If the area they visited is in red, the employee needs to quarantine and be off work for seven days or until they have a negative test result prior to returning to work. If the county visited is not a high risk area there are no travel restrictions (<https://globaepidemics.org/key-metrics-for-covid-suppression/>). Additionally, if a staff member has any of the symptoms listed, has a temperature above 100, or has traveled to a high risk area they will be sent home and not able to work until symptoms have passed, they are fever free for 24 hours (without the use of fever reducing medication), or the designated timeframe has passed. As a reminder, these precautions are currently being utilized in tandem with the Pavilions weekly staff COVID-19 testing. If staff answer yes to any of the screening questions regarding having COVID symptoms a Registered Nurse (RN) is there to assess the staff member.

Grand Traverse Pavilions is accepting limited new admissions, however, there are strict processes in place for the health and safety of our residents and staff. All new admissions and re-admissions will be tested for COVID-19 within 72 hours prior to their admission with a negative result. Once admitted they will be placed on a designated wing of the Rehab Pavilion and remain in their room for 14 days, when not receiving treatments. They will be required to wear a mask at any time out of their room, and will be expected to maintain social distancing from others on the unit. If a resident must go out of the facility for an appointment they will be required to isolate for the required 14 days. When applicable, the use of telehealth has increased to provide outpatient medical appointments with specialists. This practice helps balance the need for providing residents with necessary appointments while minimizing the risk of disease transmission to other vulnerable residents and healthcare personnel.

Early in the pandemic, the Pavilions offered families the option to utilize technology to keep connected to their family members. The implementation of video chatting via FaceTime, Google Duo or Facebook Messenger is being utilized for virtual visits. Skype is not being utilized at this time. The use of personal cell phones has also increased to allow families to stay connected.

Additionally, in early June, once the Stay Home Stay Safe Executive Order was lifted, the Pavilions implemented a policy for window visits to ensure the safety and effectiveness of the visits for the residents. Cell phones have proven effective tools for these visits to allow for better communication, since hearing through closed windows can be difficult, especially for those residents with hearing issues. Window visits are arranged through the resident's assigned pavilion Social Worker.

While it is not currently allowed for the Pavilions to invite visitors or volunteers back into the facility, the Pavilions is preparing by installing thermal imaging cameras (the same technology utilized to scan staff), conducting symptom checks for each guest, along with requiring masking and hand hygiene and eye protection procedures upon entering the facility.

The most recent direction from the Governor to provide the opportunity for outside visits can only be implemented if there have been no reported cases of COVID in the facility for a minimum of two weeks. A policy is currently being drafted that would address how the outdoor visits will be managed, once we are able to do so safely.

"Certainly our residents have the ability to enjoy the outdoors on a regular basis with the utilization of the current pavilion courtyards associated with each unit. While the number of residents allowed outdoors at the same time is limited for social distancing, these staff supervised outdoor activities are also coordinate by the resident's social worker" Stated Rose Coleman, Chief Operating Officer – Clinical Services.

As the Pavilions prepares for these next steps they are mindful that not only are we moving into the colder winter season, but there is great concerned about the impending flu-season. "This is traditionally a time of year we try to limit resident exposure to the community acknowledging the vulnerability of our residents. Taking this into consideration while also trying to meet the recent guidelines for outdoor visits related to the COVID-19 mandates seems a bit counter-intuitive to us. We realize that our resident's and their family members are eager to have face to face contacts, and while we don't want to deprive them, we are also very mindful of the responsibility we have to keep our residents safe from potential disease and infection that could harm them and others. It is not a comfortable position to be but in – but then again, nothing about dealing with COVID-19 has been comfortable" shared Coleman.

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About Grand Traverse Pavilions

[Grand Traverse Pavilions](http://www.gtpavilions.org) is the region's first and only nonprofit Continuum of Care. Providing services for more than 300 residents and 100 daily program participants, Grand Traverse Pavilions is a community of caring and innovation primarily for our region's low-income seniors, with Wellness Center programs for the entire community. Grand Traverse Pavilions has received Nursing Care Center accreditation by the Joint Commission along with Post-Acute Care and Memory Care certifications. A recipient of the Governor's Quality Care Award, The Pavilions is owned by Grand Traverse County and governed by the Grand Traverse County Department of Health and Human Services Board. Learn more about Grand Traverse Pavilions by visiting www.gtpavilions.org.