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Contact: Renee Tilton, (410) 626-0805 or rtilton@crosbymarketing.com

## ***STUDY SHOWS SENIORS IN ASSISTED LIVING COULD BENEFIT FROM SPENDING MORE TIME OUTDOORS***

### **Paper Wins Peer-Reviewed Award From National Investment Center**

ANNAPOLIS, Md. – Although seniors who spend even modest amounts of time outdoors may benefit from improvements in mood, hormone balance, sleep patterns and increased physical activity, usable outdoor space is typically underutilized in seniors housing communities because it fails to meet residents' expectations for accessibility, comfort and aesthetics, according to a study by Dr. Susan Rodiek, associate director for the Center for Health Systems & Design at Texas A&M University.

Results of Dr. Rodiek's study – a white paper entitled "A Missing Link: Can Enhanced Outdoor Space Improve Seniors Housing?" – was awarded the GE Award for Best Research Paper in the 2006 Seniors Housing & Care Journal. The peer-reviewed Journal, published annually by the National Investment Center for the Seniors Housing & Care Industry (NIC), features articles on critical issues faced by providers in the senior living industry. David A. Lindeman, Ph.D., director of the Evanston, Ill.-based Mather LifeWays Institute on Aging, served as managing editor and oversaw the process of selecting the winning paper.

"An impressive amount of progress has been made in senior care in the last few decades in the assisted living industry," said Dr. Rodiek. "That environment provides a comfortable, homelike, residential setting that has had a positive impact on seniors' quality of life. But it seemed the one thing missing was adequate access to the outside. Even well-developed and expensive outdoor space was not being used. So, I set about studying this topic 10 years ago to find out why. I call it the 'missing link' and that became the basis for this paper."

The paper presents findings from focus groups, written surveys and photo-based surveys conducted with seniors at 14 assisted living facilities, which were randomly selected from 12 counties in Texas. The research answers several questions, including:

- Are seniors interested in going outdoors?
- How do they feel after being outside?
- What are the potential health benefits?
- Why are outdoor spaces underutilized?
- What issues need to be addressed so that outdoor space will be used?
- How can providers benefit from increased usage?

Although Rodiek's research found that while some residents' concerns about using outdoor space could take time to address – such as improving the aesthetics of the space itself – other concerns were relatively easy to fix. For example, some seniors just cited the need for places to sit and rest. Others noted that doors to the outside were difficult to negotiate, which in many cases may be addressed by a simple adjustment of the existing overhead door-closing device.

“This paper is important,” said Anthony J. Mullen, NIC research director, “because although we’ve made great strides as an industry in how we care for our elderly, this paper shows that there is still room for improvement.” He noted that operators who are developing new properties or renovating existing ones should take advice from the conclusions drawn from the study.

“Better design of the outdoor areas would not only improve resident satisfaction and well-being,” said Rodiek, “but it could also produce financial benefits for senior living providers.” She noted that communities with happier residents are easier to manage and those properties are easier to market to prospective residents. Family members are also likely to visit more often and stay longer, helping to supplement staff care.

Dr. Rodiek was presented with her award and a \$4,500 check from John Cobb, senior managing director, GE Healthcare Financial Services, whose company sponsored the monetary gift, at the recent NIC Conference. She donated the cash prize to Texas A&M University, where it will be used to start a Design for Aging Scholarship at the Center for Health Systems & Design.

In addition, Rodiek just received funding from the National Institutes of Health to create a multi-media program that will teach the principles outlined in her paper to providers, especially those offering assisted living. The CDs will eventually be offered through NIC and ALFA.

Other articles included in the 2006 Seniors Housing & Care Journal are “Whole-Person Wellness Outcomes in Senior Living Communities,” “Linking Affordable Housing with Services,” “Toward a Framework for Monitoring the Quality of Care in Residential Care for the Elderly” and “Leaders’ Views of Nursing Home Culture Change.”

Copies of the publication are available for \$95. To purchase, visit [www.NIC.org](http://www.NIC.org) or call NIC at (410) 267-0504.

#### ABOUT NIC

Founded in 1991, the National Investment Center for the Seniors Housing & Care Industry is a nonprofit organization providing information about business strategy and capital formation for the senior living industry. Proceeds from its events – the 2007 NIC Western Regional Symposium held on March 7-8, 2007, in Las Vegas, Nev. and the 17th Annual NIC Conference scheduled for Oct. 3-5, 2007, in Washington, D.C. – are used to fund research and data that leads to informed investment decision-making to advance the seniors housing and care industry. For more information about NIC, visit [www.NIC.org](http://www.NIC.org) or call (410) 267-0504.

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