

## HEALTH

BY BLAINE GAMST



Blaine Gamst is the executive director of Ecumen Lakeshore.

# FACE IT, DULUTH: WE ARE GETTING OLDER

**A**cross our nation, 10,000 baby boomers are turning 65 years old each day. By 2020, seniors will outnumber school-age children for the first time in U.S. history. The U.S. population over the age of 65 will grow from 35 million in the year 2000 to 55 million in year 2020. By the year 2030, 25 percent of adults in Minnesota will be over 65 and the U.S. population over 65 will reach 70 million.

From a senior housing and health-care perspective, this rapidly growing baby boomer population brings a variety of challenges and opportunities. We know that as people age they need more health-care services and more help to remain in their homes. While both are important, the total impact boomers will have on our communities extends to most every aspect of everyday life – especially transportation, politics, workforce, family caregiving and consumer spending. When you stop to think about it all, the potential impact is staggering.

OUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE WILL BE FINDING ENOUGH PEOPLE INTERESTED IN CAREGIVING AND NURSING CAREERS.





Given demographic trends over the next 30 years, we face some grim realities: There will not be an adequate number of professional caregivers available; we won't have enough senior housing; and many seniors won't be able to afford the services that they need. The shortage of professional caregivers will create a major crisis for those needing direct care. Ultimately, caregiving responsibilities will fall back onto our communities – primarily our families and friends. At some point, we are all likely to find ourselves in a caregiving role. The reality is that senior care providers will not have the capacity to provide the professional care and services needed to meet all the needs of the seniors in our community.

All of us in the Duluth community will need to find ways to support our aging population. I encourage you to continue this conversation and to start taking action now. Look around at those in your

life who need a little extra support. Perhaps they are struggling to enjoy some of the activities they once enjoyed. Maybe a family member's yard needs to be mowed. Help them mow it. We all have that one older neighbor who likes to strike up a conversation. Invite them to coffee. As a community, we need to think of ways to encourage and include our seniors in our lives. By keeping them engaged, our communities will be better places.

In the future, our community can expect Ecumen Lakeshore's services to allow people options to stay in their homes longer and healthier. Like many communities, we know our biggest challenge will be finding enough people interested in caregiving and nursing

careers. We will maintain a commitment to employing great people along with finding new and creative ways to provide services through volunteers and by using other community resources to help offset some of the staffing shortfalls that we may face. We also will continue to leverage Ecumen's 150-plus years of experience in providing senior care to develop partnerships and help provide services that meet our community's needs.

Together, we all play a part in this community and have a responsibility to care for and support our seniors. Now, more than ever, we need to find ways to work together in order to meet the needs of our rapidly aging population. **D**

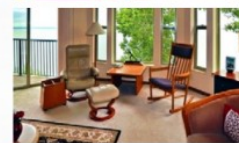
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