



Grandpa Gary and great-granddaughter, Jeanie—their bond strong from the start.

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Justus always looked up to his grandpa, who was there for him through everything.

A HEARTBEAT THAT HEALS

At Ecumen Hospice, care goes beyond medical support. It's about creating meaningful moments for patients and lasting memories for their families.

Gary was always the heart of the family, welcoming and devoted to those he loved. Grandson Justus felt that he was more than a grandfather; he was a steady presence and source of comfort throughout his life. When Justus and his wife, Anna, shared that they were expecting baby Jeanie, Gary was overjoyed.

When he was diagnosed with ALS, Gary's family faced the difficult journey together. They already knew the compassion of Ecumen well, since Anna had recently joined the Ecumen Hospice team.

Anna learned about the Heartbeat Recording Legacy Project, which allows families to preserve a loved one's heartbeat and combine it with

meaningful music as a keepsake. Ecumen's board-certified music therapist, Martha, recorded Gary's heartbeat shortly before his passing, capturing the rhythm of his love and life in a way words never could.

Hearing the recording, paired with the song "Even Though I'm Leaving," was emotional and healing for the family. It's now a timeless reminder of Gary's presence and the bond they shared.

Because of generosity like yours, families like Gary's can hold onto the sound of a heartbeat, and the love it represents, forever.

**Read Gary's full story
and listen to his heartbeat**

[ecumen.org/blog/
a-heartbeat-that-heals/](https://ecumen.org/blog/a-heartbeat-that-heals/)





Volunteers and generous donors come together to honor a veteran with a special quilt.



A proud tribute to Ecumen North Branch veterans

HONORING THOSE WHO SERVED

We are honored to serve those who once served us. Across Ecumen communities, team members and volunteers support veterans with respect, compassion, and gratitude.

COMPASSIONATE CARE AND MEANINGFUL MOMENTS

Hospice team members help guide veterans toward a more peaceful end of life. Hospice volunteers, many of them veterans themselves, offer companionship and connection, leading meaningful pinning ceremonies to recognize the service and sacrifice of fellow veterans.

A LIVING TRIBUTE AT ECUMEN NORTH BRANCH

When visitors enter the main lobby at Ecumen North Branch, they are greeted by a powerful sight—a wall honoring residents who served in the United States Armed Forces.

Each framed photo features a veteran's name, rank, and years of service, creating a lasting tribute to their courage and commitment.

"Our veterans are an integral part of our community," says Molly DeFrance, Life Enrichment Director. **"This wall ensures their stories are never forgotten."**

CONNECTION AND COMPANIONSHIP

At Ecumen Prairie Hill and Ecumen Sand Prairie in St. Peter, veterans gather for "Coffee with Veterans," a time for stories and camaraderie. Additionally, volunteers from the American Legion Post 37 join for monthly "Veterans Visits."

Among those who join is Ellis, an Army veteran and retired Gustavus Adolphus College professor. Ellis served in the Army at Fort Knox, Kentucky, where he worked as secretary to the commanding general. Though his service didn't take him overseas, he vividly recalls the camaraderie of his fellow soldiers—and the loss of one who was later killed in Korea.

Today, Ellis looks forward to the Friday coffee hour with fellow veterans. "We sit around a table, maybe 10 or 15 of us, and share stories about our time in service," he says.



St. Peter resident vets enjoy monthly fellowship.

“Even though we were in different branches and different parts of the world, we find common ground.”

Dave, a former St. Peter police officer and Legion member, helped start Veterans Visits. Each month, volunteers visit seven senior living communities, bringing together 35 to 45 veterans, spouses, and family members. “Our goal is simple,” Dave explains. “To thank veterans for their service, remind them they are not forgotten, and share updates about benefits and local Legion events.”

The visits also provide deep meaning for volunteers. “They connect with me,” Dave adds. “I get so much out of seeing their smiles and hearing their stories. That connection means everything.”

Dave credits Ecumen team members like Robyn Sellner, Life Enrichment Specialist at Sand Prairie, for helping make each visit a success. “Robyn’s always there with a smile, helping the residents get ready before we arrive. She’s one of our biggest supporters,” he says.

Honoring veterans is more than a tradition—it’s a heartfelt commitment. Through compassionate care, meaningful recognition, and shared stories, we ensure those who served continue to be seen, celebrated, and supported every day.



Elaine finds peace and belonging at Ecumen.

ELAINE'S STORY

FINDING CARE AND COMMUNITY AT ECUMEN ST. BENEDICT'S

When Elaine lost her husband more than four decades ago, she was raising three children on her own. She built a new life in St. Cloud, working as a receptionist and later retiring to a peaceful apartment at St. Benedict's Village.

After experiencing two strokes while visiting family in Colorado, Elaine returned to Minnesota—on one condition: there had to be a room for her at St. Benedict's.

Now, nearly four years later, Elaine continues to find joy in everyday moments like attending outdoor concerts, visiting with her niece, and soaking in the fresh air she loves so much.

“I think it’s a great place to live,” she says. **“The people that work here are friendly, the people that live here are friendly. What more can you ask for?”**

Listen to Elaine share her story
in her own words



THREADS OF COMPASSION

HOW RESIDENTS AT CHATEAU WATERS ARE WEAVING KINDNESS INTO COMMUNITY

What began as a simple knitting circle blossomed into something extraordinary. Residents created prayer shawls, hats, and scarves that carry love and comfort far beyond their community walls. With every stitch, these neighbors at Ecumen Chateau Waters in Sartell are weaving together fellowship, faith, and compassion—reminding us all how small acts of kindness can ripple outward in powerful ways.



With donated yarn and caring hands, residents created shawls of comfort for neighbors.



Read the full story

How a Knitting Group
Sparked Connection Across
Ecumen Communities

GRATEFUL HEARTS

Every day, Ecumen team members provide life-honoring care by offering comfort, support, and compassion.

We invite you to express your gratitude through a Grateful Hearts gift, a meaningful tribute in honor of an Ecumen team member, friend, or loved one. Your generosity supports programs and experiences that bring joy and fulfillment to our community, enhancing the quality of life for all.

A Grateful Hearts gift is more than a thoughtful gesture; it's a way to celebrate outstanding care while making a lasting impact in our communities. Your donation honors the dedication of Ecumen team members and supports programs that improve the lives of those we serve.



Scan to give or visit
ecumen.org/gratefulhearts

YOUR GENEROSITY AT WORK! 2024 IMPACT REPORT

On behalf of the Ecumen community, we thank you for your generosity in 2024. Your commitment to residents, clients, patients, and team members has made a difference. We could not do our work without you. We hope you feel inspired and proud of what you made possible!



Read our
2024 Impact Report

