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Communication Plan for Caressant Care Woodstock

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Executive Summary

Caressant Care Woodstock needs to redeem its reputation after a nurse who worked there killed seven residents as part of a murder spree that made national headlines. The reactive communication strategies during the crisis were neither timely nor forthcoming. The case triggered cries for stricter oversight into long-term care homes, two lawsuits and an upcoming inquiry.

More elderly Ontarians than ever require long-term care, and they're entering nursing homes older, frailer and with more high-need conditions. Families increasingly rely on institutions to provide that care, and count on regulators to ensure the safety of their operation. Technology gives more people the opportunity to know what's happening in those institutions and voice their opinions. The traditional news media that covered the story extensively is viewed most often by Caressant Care's key public of people in their 50's or 60's who need care for their parents.

Financial pressures faced by Caressant Care include funding shortfalls from a cash-strapped government. Even in the subsidized system, accommodation costs can be difficult to bear for some families, leaving little room to squeeze extra funding for needed improvements.

The key publics in priority order are the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, the decision-making family members who are considering care for their parents, residents and potential residents, the media, families of the victims, employees and potential employees and competing nursing homes.

The goals are to rebuild and improve the reputation and to attract highly qualified new employees to the organization. The objectives are to make the public aware of Caressant Care's new commitment to health and safety and to improve its rating on the Canadian Institute for Health and Information.

Proactive strategies include audience engagement, special events, news generation and highlighting improvements in the organization's performance. Reactive strategies include rectifying the behaviour, vocal commiseration and diversionary approaches.

The key messages focus on organizational responsibility and oversight, personalized care and community engagement. The tactics involve generating news with programs that involve the community, reaching out to the media, connecting with key publics on Facebook and with an email newsletter and regular surveying of key publics. The former spokesperson will no longer be the public face of Caressant Care and a new one will be chosen based on relatability to the key public.

Caressant Care's organizational objectives and day-to-day operations must align with the goals of this communication plan to successfully rebuild its reputation.

Business Need

After being at the centre of one of the largest mass murders in Ontario's history, Caressant Care is facing a critical need to rebuild a tarnished reputation. Caressant Care must demonstrate trustworthiness, professionalism, and high standards for safety and care to disassociate the brand with the criminal actions of one of its former employees. The organization also must be much more communicative than it has been in the past to be perceived as transparent and caring to its key publics.

Analysis of the Situation

Overview:

Of the 15 nursing homes in the Caressant Care chain, the facility in Woodstock became the focal point in one of Canada's most prolific killing sprees. Former nurse Elizabeth Wettlaufer worked at Caressant Care Woodstock from 2007 to 2014, when she was fired. In that time, she murdered seven residents at the home, attempted to kill two others, and assaulted two more. In every case, she injected them with either fatal or injurious doses of insulin. She also killed another patient and injured others at a second home after her dismissal from Caressant Care.

Even after Wettlaufer was first charged in October of 2016, new, unrelated allegations of mistreatment of patients and incompetence among staff emerged and were publicized in the news media. By January of 2017, the Ministry of Long-Term Care halted admissions to the home after inspections revealed failures to meet minimum standards that put residents' safety at risk. In each of these crises, Caressant Care's reactive communication failed to address the matters in a forthcoming or timely fashion, and sometimes conflicted with existing records, such as Wettlaufer profile at the College of Nurses of Ontario, which indicated no record of disciplinary action against her in the time she worked for Caressant Care. The public blaming and denial put Caressant Care's own communication in a poor light, further damaging the brand's reputation.

In June of 2017, Wettlaufer pleaded guilty to all the charges and is currently serving a life sentence in prison. Two months later, the families of two of her victims filed a lawsuit alleging that Caressant Care Woodstock and another home were negligent for failing to stop Wettlaufer from killing patients in her care.

STEP Analysis

Socio-cultural factors:

Increasingly, Canadians rely on institutions to provide long-term care for the elderly. With people living longer than ever, it's often the case that people in their 90's who require nursing care have children who themselves are the younger elderly in their 70's and may not be able to care for their parents at home. Or, If their children are still working age, they aren't at home often enough care for their parents in their home. Our culture also prioritizes the ability of each individual to live as full a life as possible, with travel and leisure pursuits for those who can afford it, and those priorities often come before caring for loved ones at home. Because people rely on institutional care, they also trust regulatory authorities to ensure the safety of those they oversee. When failures in oversight occur, the publics of those organizations will demand improvements to safety and take their concerns to the courts or other higher levels if necessary.

People are living longer than they ever, and reach their most senior years suffering from conditions such as dementia that require intensive care. A large number of very frail residents with complex needs is increasingly seen in nursing homes now. Due to changes made in 2010, only people with high or very high care needs are eligible to get into the province's long-term care homes. That puts an additional strain on institutional caregivers, especially as short staffing affects the ability to provide every resident with the full care they need.

Technological Factors:

The internet and social media has given an organization's publics more opportunity than ever to have their views influence others' behaviour. Poor ratings on sites like NursingHomeRatings.ca, where family members can share their honest and sometimes unflinching opinions, can allow negative factors to linger in the minds of the potential customers even after those factors have been corrected. Disgruntled and traumatized family members had their stories of loss, grief, anger, and frustration played out in nightly newscasts, on radio throughout the day and the websites of major news outlets across the country and locally.

While television viewing is declining, it remains high among people over fifty, a key public for Caressant Care. That means the people who are making decisions about long-term care for their aging parent are the same people most likely to view the negative television news stories about the failings in the institution.

The internet has given the public has more access to information on the results of inspections done by regulatory agencies. Interested people can look up the details online in reports published by the Ministry of Long-Term Care, so more people have the knowledge to hold institutions accountable for their actions.

Economic Factors:

Even though Caressant Care's reputation has been damaged, it's unlikely to force it out of business because there are long waiting lists to get into long-term care homes in the province, and demand is growing with an aging population that's living longer.

Caressant Care is a for-profit organization that could potentially have to pay out a financial penalty if the judge finds in favour of the family members who are suing. The organization is already sustaining extra costs for legal defence in the lawsuits.

All care provided in Ontario's long-term care homes in Ontario is funded by the government, though residents still must pay for accommodation charges. The costs of that accommodation is set by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and is standardized across the province. The current maximum rates for basic accommodation in a shared room in over \$1800 a month, and go up to \$2600 for a private room. Low income residents can qualify for a subsidy, but they are still left with very little of their own money each month. Ontario's debt and deficit is another challenge to funding long-term care, in a time when the demands for it are only increasing. These factors mean there is little room left on either the side of the users or the government to provide the funding necessary to improve oversight and care, and ultimately redeem Caressant Care's image and reputation.

Political Factors:

Ontario's Ministry of Long-Term Care is under pressure to implement stricter oversight of operations in long-term care homes to ensure that no other resident is murdered while in care ever again, putting Caressant Care under more scrutiny than it would otherwise face from ministry inspectors.

The Province has ordered a public inquiry to determine how Wettlaufer was able to get away with killing so many people for so long at Caressant Care, and later in other locations. The horrific details will be repeated again and again in the news, as the inquiry isn't due to report on the findings until the end of July, 2019. That makes it even more difficult for communicators at Caressant Care to put the crisis behind them.

The College of Nurses of Ontario wants to be seen as a competent steward of the professionals it oversees, and that competence was threatened by the public dispute between Caressant Care and the College. When it held a disciplinary hearing to strip Wettlaufer of her nursing licence, the College revealed that Caressant Care's nursing director "indicated there was no underlying issue or concern" about Wettlaufer at the time she was fired. The College will be eager to divulge what Caressant Care failed to report because it does not want to be implicated in the deaths of the patients there.

Analysis of the Publics (in priority order)

- LIMITERS/ENABLERS: Ontario Ministry of Health and and Long-Term Care
 - Dr. Eric Hoskins (Minister) is both a limiter and an enabler because he and the Ministry have the power to both limit and enable Caressant Care's operations by shutting them down for violations and granting approvals.
 - The News Media could potentially be a channel to disseminate further messages that harm Caressant Care's reputation, or messages that undo the damage.
 - The College of Nurses of Ontario is eager to distance itself from anything that could implicate it in the killings
- CUSTOMERS: The decision-making family members seeking care for their elderly relatives. That is often the eldest daughter in a family. Current and potential residents are also key publics, as they share their feelings and experiences with the decisionmaking family members.
- LIMITERS: Families of the victims of Elizabeth Wettlaufer, the former nurse at Caressant
 Care who was convicted of killing eight patients in care. They are opinion leaders due to
 their prominence in the media as the crisis emerged and during Wettlaufer's trial.
 - Susan Horvath, daughter of Wettlaufer victim Arpad Horvath. She was very vocal in media reports about the crimes.
 - Arpad Horvath Jr, son of Wettlaufer victim Arpad Horvath. He is suing Caressant Care Woodstock, alleging the organization was negligent for failing to stop Wettlaufer from murdering patients in her care.
 - Andrea Silcox, daughter of Wettlaufer victim James Silcox. She has also launched a lawsuit accusing Caressant Care Woodstock of negligence.
- PRODUCERS: Employees and potential employees who provide care to the residents and who would be motivated to undo the damage that Wettlaufer caused to the reputation of nursing professionals.
- LIMITERS: Other nursing/retirement homes in the market who compete with Caressant Care and have higher ratings on nursing home rating sites.

Analysis of the Organization

Strengths

- Some employees could be highlighted for the exceptional care they provide
- Operates several other homes in southwestern Ontario, some with better ratings than the Woodstock operation at the centre of the crisis
- The demand for long-term care remains strong and is growing.

Weaknesses

- Reputation has been severely damaged, not just by the crimes but by failures in communication during the crisis
- Well-publicized allegations of incompetence abuse outside the Wettlaufer case
- Poor ratings on NursingHomeRatings.ca

Opportunities

- Turn the crisis into an opportunity to usher in of a new era of accountability, transparency and oversight of medication handling procedures, and be seen as bold enough to forge a new identity
- The ushering in of a new era could also be used to downplay the lawsuits launched by victims' families who say they are only suing for \$250,000 because they're more interested in forcing long-term care homes to ensure safeguards are in place to prevent a similar tragedy in the future. Caressant Care could say it's already implementing the desired changes so the lawsuit isn't necessary.
- Highlight the caring, professional staff who provide compassionate care to residents
- Use the improved reputation of existing staff and the improved accountability standards to attract highly qualified new staff
- Leverage the news media and social media platforms to tell positive stories. Both
 Facebook and conventional television newscasts are well-used by people in their 50's
 who are the customers and a key public.

Threats:

- The potential for another criminal action involving an employee could prevent the reputation from ever being restored.
- The lawsuits will again associate a serial killer with the Caressant Care brand. The
 judge's decision could cost the organization money on top of existing legal fees, and
 cast authoritative blame on Caressant Care for its role in the deaths.
- The inquiry will focus further negative attention on Caressant Care
- Heightened scrutiny from the Ministry of Long-Term Care, which can has in the past shut down the operation completely due to non-compliance issues discovered during inspections.

Goals and Objectives

After Caressant Care rebuilds and improves its reputation, it aims to be the "top-of-mind" choice for potential residents and decision making family members, and to attract quality, professional employees. The specific goals and objectives are as follows:

Reputation Goal: To rebuild and improve the image and reputation of Caressant Care.

Objective: Make the public aware of Caressant Care's commitment to health, safety, and care by publicizing increased training, background checks, and criteria of staff.

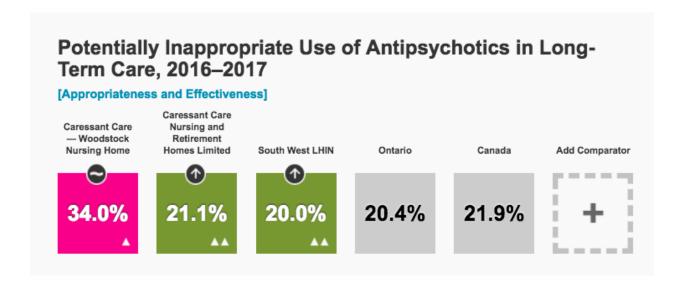
Category: Awareness/Acceptance. This objective targets Caressant Care's public of customers, including current and potential residents, as well as decision-making family members and aims to inspire a change in attitude regarding Caressant Care's reputation. To measure the effectiveness of this objective, Caressant Care's communications team will hold information sessions/open houses about heightened training of staff and conduct surveys every 3-6 months in Woodstock and area. Between January 2018 and January 2019, Caressant Care aspires to double their initial approval rating (gathered during first survey).

Objective: Increase overall Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) rating from below average to average or above average. Category: Awareness/Action. This objective targets Caressant Care's public of customers, including current and potential residents, as well as decision-making family members and aims to inspire a change in attitude regarding Caressant Care's reputation. An average or above average CIHI rating will result in a positive change in attitude in Caressant Care's public of customers. Caressant Care hopes to achieve an overall rating of average by January 2019, and an overall rating of above average by January 2020.

The 2016 report shows mainly average and below average scores with no above average scores.



The largest discrepancy between ratings for Caressant Care Woodstock and Canada is in the category of Inappropriate Use of Antipsychotics in Long Term Care:



Task Goal: To attract high-quality, professional employees.

Objective: Improve training level of employees. Category: Action.

This objective targets Caressant Care's producers public of current and potential employees. The desired effect of improving hiring and employment standards will be an increased level of care of residents and an elevated level of public trust in Caressant Care. This objective will be measured by conducting surveys of residents and family members, as well as interview about the level of care, competency, and the professionalism of staff. Staff should be hired, trained, and evaluated on a rolling basis via thorough background checks and psychological check-ins every six months.

Action and Response Strategies

Proactive Strategies

 Special events: Caressant Care will earn goodwill by holding a public award ceremony open to residents, families, staff and the media. The event will recognize Caressant Care nursing staff members who have gone above and beyond in showing compassion and care to its residents. The same event will also honour the organization's volunteers to highlight the positive relationships between Caressant Care staff and residents and their families.

- Audience engagement: Caressant Care will ask its publics "How can we do better?" by conducting formal and informal surveys throughout the year. These surveys will show publics, especially customers, that their voices and opinions are heard and valued.
- Organizational performance: Caressant Care will enforce the strictest medication handling procedures of any facility and highlight its uncompromising standards in every communication channel. These policies and procedures once firmly established will generate the confidence of the regulators at the Ministry of Long-Term Care to relax the extreme scrutiny under which the Ministry currently views the organization. These new standards will also comfort current and potential customers and improve Caressant Care's reputation as trustworthy.
- Generate news: Caressant Care should "see and be seen" at community events as well
 as hosting special events of its own (mentioned above). By generating news, loyalty and
 trust will be fostered in Caressant Care's publics.

Reactive Strategies

- Rectifying behaviour Caressant Care will admit fault and apologize for the actions of Elizabeth Wettlaufer and Caressant Care's own initial inactions. Caressant Care will explain to the publics, especially its customers, what it is doing to rectify the past behaviour by sharing new and improved hiring, training, and employment policies and procedures.
- Vocal commiseration A lot of good can come from acknowledging mistakes and making a genuine apology. Caressant Care will make sincere apologies to everyone affected in the Wettlaufer case.
- Diversionary By showcasing the many positive staff/resident relationships and stories
 present in Caressant Care, the diversionary strategy will help Caressant Care to
 distance itself from previous mistakes.

Messaging

Messaging is an important aspect for building credibility and overcoming the stain on Caressant Care's reputation. By conveying the key messages consistently in words and in actions, Caressant Care can renew its reputation so that the past behaviour is forgiven or forgotten and the new image supplants the tarnished one.

The decision to rectify behavior and implement improvements is not successful unless the key publics are aware of it. The gap between what Caressant Care is doing to rectify its procedures and how a dissatisfied public may perceive the organization can be filled with the right

communication process. To accomplish this, all three important aspects of a compelling message will be used:

- Ethos builds on trustworthiness, similarity, reputation and authority to gain confidence. Although its credibility has been damaged, Caressant Care does still have expertise in providing nursing care, decades of experience, and familiarity in the community and beyond with 25 operations throughout the province. In addition, it is accredited by the Commission of Accreditation of Rehabilitative Facilities (CARF) and even obtained two consecutive three-year awards. That's the highest level long-term care homes can achieve. CARF is recognized by the province as an accreditation authority.
- Logos appeals to the inherent logic of the message. The publics can be persuaded of the reasonable likelihood that the nurses in its employ are caring professionals, and that Wettlaufer's criminal conduct in no way reflects their behaviour. In addition, the organization is going through a makeover with changes in management, staff and policies, making it reasonable to believe that the organization can be redeemed from its failings.
- Pathos draws on an emotional appeal to persuade a public. The apology will convey how deeply hurt every member of the Caressant Care organization was by the murders that happened under its watch, and that they too were devastated by the revelations. This conflict resolution approach aims to restore some measure of peace between the organization and the families. Similarly, the visual components of the messaging, such as young people cheerfully engaging with residents will associate positive emotions with the Caressant Care experience.

Key Messages:

- We too were deeply saddened by the Wettlaufer case.
- We have rectified all the problems that played a role.
- Caressant Care has implemented the strictest oversight of its procedures.
- Our care is personalized and compassionate.
- We welcome and engage the community.

Positioning Statement:

Caressant Care is the only nursing home that combines the strictest medication handling protocols with personalized care to provide a long-term home in residents' own communities in small towns across Ontario so that families can stay close to their loved ones.

Spokespeople:

Caressant Care's communication manager Lee Griffi has been associated with past communication failings such as dismissing the news media and statements that appear to deny responsibility for Caressant Care's role in the Wettlaufter crimes. Because that communication strategy further cast the organization in a bad light, Mr. Griffi will not be the public face of Caressant Care's renewed communication approach.

A new spokesperson will be chosen based on his or her relatability to the key public of people between 50 and mid-60's who need long-term care for their aging parents. This individual is to be seen as having the same concerns as the key target public. Sincerity, charisma and a professional but approachable manner will define the spokesperson's presentation. The criteria for selecting this individual will also require that he or she not be associated with any negative detractors which could potentially introduce a new reputation problem.

Tactics

Caressant Care's tactics must be as controlled as possible at all times. Since the facility's reputation has been damaged, it is important going forward to keep the Caressant Care narrative consistent and the image presented strategically curated. Through the implementation of these tactics, Caressant Care will regain a reputation of trustworthiness and professionalism. The tactics in this plan are designed to reach all of Caressant Care's diverse publics through a variety of mediums, and are aligned with the previously stated proactive and reactive strategies:

- Special Events This interpersonal, diversionary communication tactic will allow Caressant Care to earn goodwill with several of their publics, including: customers, both current and potential residents, as well as decision-making family members; producers, including current and potential employees; and the enablers and limiters publics, including the media. Special events will include a public sincere apology from a new spokesperson at the appropriate time as the inquiry into the Wettlaufer case plays out in the news media. From there, the organization will move forward with events including family days, picnics, and BBQs at Caressant Care locations, as well as award ceremonies and celebrations honouring outstanding staff.
- New programming This tactic will introduce programs that engages members of the community with partnerships to support uplifting activities that promote the health and well-being of residents and give more opportunities for community members to see the organization in a positive light. The introductory program will be the Teens 'n Seniors Social that brings together high school students and residents to build friendships while participating in activities such as Bowling for Knowledge, Armchair Aerobics, Aboveground Gardening and Shuffleboard Hustle. The media advisory for this event is included in the work samples.

- Surveys This tactic engages Caressant Care's key customers public through a strategy of audience engagement and rectifying behaviour. By conducting several surveys semi-annually, Caressant Care's customers will feel their voices are heard and valued.
- Organizational Media: Newsletter Caressant Care will publish a weekly newsletter (available in both print and digital mediums) showcasing positive aspects of life at Caressant Care, such as upcoming events and outstanding staff. This controlled, diversionary, one-way media publication allows Caressant Care to curate an image of their organization that aligns with the desired positive reputation. This tactic is intended for interaction with the following publics: customers, including current and potential residents, as well as decision-making family members, and producers, including current and potential staff. See work samples below for a newsletter example.
- Social Media Caressant Care will utilize social media to reach several of their publics including: customers, both current and potential residents, as well as decision-making family members; producers, including current and potential employees; and the enablers and limiter publics, including the media. This digital, interactive media will demonstrate a curated image of positivity and professionalism while encouraging conversation with and among Caressant Care's publics. Facebook is Caressant Care's preferred platform as it is a used among a wide span of age groups, espeically people in their 50's who would be decision-making family members. See work samples below for sample Facebook posts.
- News Media: Media Releases This one-way, controlled media tactic will allow Caressant Care to share their curated messaging with all of their publics: limiters and enablers, including the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, The College of Nurses of Ontario, and the news media; customers, both current and potential residents, as well as decision-making family members; producers, including current and potential employees; limiters, including families of the victims of Elizabeth Wettlaufer, and the enablers and limiters publics, including the media.
- Organizational Site Involvement Caressant Care will invite all of its publics, (limiters and enablers, including the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, The College of Nurses of Ontario, and the news media; customers, both current and potential residents, as well as decision-making family members; producers, including current and potential employees; limiters, including families of the victims of Elizabeth Wettlaufer, and the enablers and limiters publics, including the media) to visit Caressant Care locations. During these visits, information-seeking publics will listen to Caressant Care's apology and action plan to rectify the unacceptable behaviour of the past. This vocal commiseration will help to rebuild the relationship between Caressant Care and its publics.

Conclusion

To renew trust, Caressant Care's messaging cannot be divorced from its operation, especially crucial as its operation truly involves life and death decisions. This plan is an important step toward rebuilding Caressant Care's reputation and it can be successful if the organization's objectives and day-to-day operation align with the goals outlined in the plan. When the goals are aligned, Caressant Care will be in the position of strength it needs to sustain continued positive momentum throughout the public inquiry into Wettlaufer's crimes.

Work Samples

Facebook:







Caressant Care Nursing and Retirement Homes added 2 new photos.

2 January at 09:52 - @

Welcome to 2018! The weather continues to be frightful in Southern Ontario so why not take this opportunity to book a tour at one of Caressant Care's ten Retirement Homes. We offer affordable, allinclusive rates which include all meals and snacks, housekeeping and laundry, medication distribution and much much more. We welcome shorts stays as well! Come in our of the cold and let our caring and professional staff members take care of you.

For more information check our the Retirement Homes section of our website at www.caressantcare.com.



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E-mail Newsletter:



Shuffle Board Success!

Big thanks to everyone who came out to participate in our annual shuffle board tournament!

It was a fun day for friends and family. Check out the photo gallery on Facebook here.

This week at Caressant Care:



Chair Yoga returns!

Chair Yoga returns to all locations February 1st. Take a seat in the rec room and get ready to work up a sweat!

Staff Spotlight

Meet Kelly! Kelly started working at Caressant Care in 2015. "The best thing about my job is learning all about the generations before me. I love talking with our residents over a cup of afternoon tea!" Thank you for all you do, Kelly!

Keep Reading



Don't miss our next event!

Family Bingo Night!



Invite your family and friends to join us at all Caressant Care locations for Family Bingo Night February 24th, 2018. RSVP here! Hope to see you there!





MEDIA ADVISORY

For Immediate Release: January 16, 2018

Caressant Care Woodstock unveils a unique partnership to foster friendship between students and seniors in long-term care

(WOODSTOCK, Ontario) – Caressant Care Woodstock is hosting the grand opening of its Teens 'n Seniors Social. High school students from the Thames Valley District School Board have been matched with residents at Woodstock's Caressant Care Home for intergenerational bonding that's lifting spirits for everyone in the program. Residents will again meet up with their matches and take part in activities that improve mental alertness of seniors in care and the emotional well-being for all involved.

Who: Angie Davis, teacher at Woodstock Collegiate Institute

Betty Bell, Nursing Lead, Caressant Care Woodstock

Members of the Teens 'n Seniors Social Program and their families

Date: Monday, January 29, 2018, 11 a.m.

Location: Caressant Care Woodstock, 81 Fyfe Avenue, Woodstock, ON N4S 8Y2

Photo opportunity

Following the grand unveiling, residents and their young friends will participate in Above-ground Gardening, Shuffleboard Hustle, Bowling for Knowledge and Armchair Aerobics. Students, residents and their families are available for interviews on how this extraordinary program is showing age is no barrier to friendship and new discoveries.

About Caressant Care

Caressant Care Woodstock is a 60-bed nursing home with a history of caring dating back to 1975. It's part of the Caressant Care family of 15 nursing homes and 10 retirement homes located primarily in small towns in Ontario. Many residents are friends, neighbours and even family members of our staff. This small town atmosphere is evident in the care, respect and helpfulness shown by our dedicated staff.

For more information please contact:

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