

MY STORY: CAREERS IN CARING



John Erickson



ENTREPRENEURSHIP
AND INNOVATION



SENIOR LIVING
AND HOSPITALITY

John Erickson is Chairman and Founder of Erickson Retirement Communities, the fastest-growing developer and manager of full-service, campus-style communities in the country. John developed the idea of the retirement community in 1983 and the company's flagship in Catonsville, MD grew into the largest continuing care retirement community in the U.S. In addition to Erickson Retirement Communities, John developed the first approved Medicare Advantage Plan and developed Retirement Living TV, a network dedicated to informing and involving those 55 and older. He and his wife, Nancy, also founded the Erickson Foundation, which donated toward the formation of the Erickson School of Aging Studies at UMBC. In 2008, the Wall Street Journal named him one of 12 people changing retirement and McKnight's Long-Term Care News and McKnight's Senior Living named him one of the top 40 notable newsmakers from the past four decades.

1. Describe your current role.

I was the founder of the Erickson Retirement in 1981 and lead the company until 2010 when it was sold to current owner Redwood Capital.

2. How did you become interested in the field of aging?

I started with 55+ leisure housing in Florida around 1972 and thought for every person moving to Florida at least 20 others stayed home in the cities up north. I wanted to bring the rich social life of senior living to those that stayed in the northern cities and targeted the 75 year old's instead of the younger active adults that moved to the leisure communities.

3. What are your motivations/ inspirations for being in a career in aging?

I am an "unlicensed social engineer". I like making life better for others and in the 1970's and 80's this was a very underdeveloped and underserved demographic. I wanted to fix that if I could and I always like to be around older adults and admired their contribution to America.

4. Tell us something about your career that makes you feel especially proud.

I created an unimaginably better life for more than 50,000 seniors over my 30 years at Erickson and built a company culture where 12,000 employees enjoyed being part of the mission.

5. What is the number one thing you look forward to every day at work?

Growing and leading the mission and sharing the vision of where we could ultimately take our work.

6. What is your most memorable/rewarding experience working in your current role?

On the 20th anniversary of opening my first community, I was visiting one of the original pioneer residents who was 99 years old and I asked her if she would come down to the dining room to celebrate with us. She said "no" because the food is terrible and I told her she had lost her taste buds and she should come anyway. She reminded me that 17 years ago when her husband died she thought her life work was over and she planned to check out (of Life). But instead she started a drama club and put on plays, a chorus group so she could do musicals, a tutoring program for some of our high school staff, and she was in charge of liturgy décor in the church. At her 90th birthday party 9 years ago more than 150 residents crowned her "Queen for the Day" with her four children in attendance. She confided that it had been a wonderful ride but now she was tired on going to rest a

bit. On my drive home for the anniversary luncheon, I received a call that Muriel Caufield had died peacefully.

7. Do you have any tips for individuals considering entering the field of aging?
You will never find more rewarding work with people that have a genuine sense of appreciation. And there is almost no end to where you can find new ways to make life better. And as I frequently said "you will not run out of Old People".
8. What is one thing most people might not know about aging services?
It is a fun business. You are dealing with some of the most accomplished people in the world and they openly share their experiences, hopes, fears, successes and failures. It is like living in history and learning to make a better future.

