

AFA Membership Close-Up

GURWIN IMMERSION



The mother put on her favorite driving hat as she slipped behind the steering wheel. She admonished the children in the backseat to stop talking and buckle up. As she rolled along the two-lane road, foot on the gas, she pointed out familiar and favorite sights as they passed.

But the sights she recalled were not there, nor were the children. This woman was in the Immersion Room at Gurwin Healthcare System's memory care unit, reliving through this virtual world an experience she loved decades ago, taking her children on road trips.

"We saw the Immersion Room as a natural evolution to what our memory care unit does," said Stuart B. Almer, FACHE, president and CEO. "A magical environment is created."

Through the use of videos, the paneled room in New York's Long Island

facility can become a zoo, a beach, an Italian restaurant (soon to be enhanced with aroma therapy), a workplace-type setting from a resident's past or their home country. Many memory loss residents miss these experiences, even everyday ones like driving. Having props like a steering wheel in their hand and the feeling of going forward past rolling hills gives them the sense of independence they have lost. Brave residents who hop aboard the simulated rollercoaster throw up their hands and scream happily with the thrill of the virtual ride.

Without traditional virtual reality goggles, which are cumbersome and somewhat difficult to wear, memory care residents inside the Immersion Room can become fully immersed in their experience. Opened two years ago under

the guidance of dementia care specialists, the Immersion Room was created by Besser Rooms, also on Long Island. Almer said the room can offer calmness to the anxious and stimulation to the restless who are prone to wandering.

Art therapy also allows residents to create freely and see their masterpieces on floor-to-ceiling panels on three of the walls surrounding them. Family members are invited to join their loved ones for any activity or daily movies. With aroma therapy, viewers can even smell popcorn while they watch.

The Immersion Room was lauded for its ingenuity by senior living industry media outlet McKnight's with the 2024 Excellence in Technology Best of Show award and a gold medal in the Resident Engagement and Recreation category.

Photo courtesy of Gurwin Healthcare