

Turning Activity 'Dreams' into Themes

Presented by:
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For:
**North Dakota
Long Term Care**
ASSOCIATION
Fall Conference
September 2025

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What is a Theme-Driven Activity Program?

- **Not** a special party, a day-long theme, or week-long theme, 'plopped' onto our existing monthly activity calendar.
- Instead, a **month-long theme** that is a **common thread**, tying together:
 - All activity types (groups, small groups, sensory, individual pursuits),
 - Persons of all strengths and abilities,
 - Families & friends,
 - All departments and team members,
 - The larger organization,
 - The greater community.



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Benefits

Professionals

- Easier calendar planning,
- Less prep time for group activities,
- Better use of supply investment,
- More helping hands (other departments, families, volunteers),
- Less repetition for leaders.

Residents & Families

- Increased involvement in planning,
- More variety: New experiences! Learning! Fun!
- Improvements in mood?
- More frequent (stronger?) connections with the larger community,
- More pleasurable family visits.



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Benefits

The Organization

- Improved staff morale (links to less turnover? Staff recruiting friends?),
- More community involvement & reputation in the community,
- More opportunities for social media – Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and traditional media coverage. Expanded market area and census?



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How to Start...

- Think about **how many** theme months you would like to do during the upcoming calendar year:
 - **4 months?** (*Brainstorm for 6 possible themes*)
 - **6 months?** (*Brainstorm for 9 possible themes*)
 - **8 months?** (*Brainstorm for 12 possible themes*)
 - **12 months?** (*Brainstorm for 18 possible themes*)
- Begin generating a list of **possible themes**. Include residents, co-workers, families, community members. Say **"yes!"** to every idea! (*Save unused ideas for next year!*)
- Plot where you would place each selected theme in the calendar.



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Sample – 6 months

January: Camp Coconut!

Tie-in: Create **fictional** observance days: 'National Coconut Hat Day,' 'North Dakota Coconut Appreciation Month,' 'North American Coconut Cream Pie Day')

Purpose: A boredom buster in the dead of winter. Include plenty of silly staff contests as team-builders and morale-boosters.

March: Great Green Days

Tie-in: St. Patrick's Day

Purpose: We have to hang up a bunch of green stuff anyway...



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Sample – 6 months

May: Health & Wellness Month
Tie-ins: National Physical Fitness & Sports Month, National Senior Health & Fitness Day
Purpose: To get outside and get moving after a long winter.

June: Something Old, Something New – Past & Present, Near & Far
Tie-in: June weddings
Purpose: Grow in community, intentionally partnering with staff of varying cultures. For example, collaborate with Somali team members to host a Somali wedding ‘show & tell’ including all 7 days of the ceremony, traditional vs. modern wedding gowns, the groom’s jouke or macawiis (clothing), sambuusa (savory snack), xalwo (a sweet confection); as residents also share their photos, mementos, and memories.

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Sample – 6 months

September: Fargo Fun Film Fest
Tie-in: Global film festivals – Venice, Toronto and New York all launch in September. A ‘red carpet’ may align with local homecoming events.
Purpose: A fun focus on Fargo-related films and TV shows; plus ‘screenings’ of any films. Mini film screenings, popcorn bar, DIY movie posters, red carpet moments, etc.

November: Nuts about North Dakota
Tie-ins: Peanut Butter Lover’s Month
 (+ stretch to include sunflower harvest and walnut gathering!)
Purpose: Something easy leading up to the holidays.

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Tips for Annual Organization

- Find a place to **gather suggestions** from team members, families, friends, community:
 - A suggestion box,
 - Shared Pinterest board,
 - Shared Google Drive,
 - Your own mini note-pad,
 - all of these!
- Begin **conversations** and **relationship-building** now with co-workers, families and community members who will be critical to make each theme work.
- Generate **supply lists** and **donation requests**.
 Begin requests **2-3 months** in advance of each theme.

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Get the word out...

Something Old, Something New!
 We’re creating a June ‘Show & Tell’ celebration around wedding traditions – past and present, near and far.
 All residents, families, and staff are invited to contribute:

From Residents, Families & Staff

- Old wedding photos (Homeid or albums)
- Wedding dresses, veils, or garters tucked away in closets
- Wedding invitations, programs, or newspaper announcements
- Cake toppers, unity candles, or guest books
- Men’s accessories (ties, cufflinks, boutonnières)
- Homeymoon souvenirs or travel postcards
- Stories or copies of handwritten vows

From Staff & Community Members

- Wedding clothing or fabrics from your culture (dresses, veils, beadwork, jewelry)
- Photos of wedding celebrations from your country
- Special foods often served at weddings in your culture
- Traditional wedding songs or instruments (drums, rattles, bells)
- Customs or rituals (beams, hair braiding, dances, blessing items)
- Marriage symbols (woven mats, carved figures, baskets)

How We’ll Use Them
 Items will be shared in display, storytelling, and ‘show & tell’ programs throughout June. We hope you will share your story!
 (We’ll take good care of borrowed items and return them safely.)

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Filling in the Monthly Calendar
 (Begin 1-2 months ahead)

- ✓ The ‘Standards’
- ✓ Jazzing-Up the ‘Standards’
- ✓ The Open Spaces
- ✓ The Celebration

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Example: Health & Wellness Month (May)

Movement & Physical	Games (Darts, Volleyball, T-Ball, Basketball)
Creative – Expressive	Relaxation & Imagery Session
Educational	Hand Massage Class
Service Project (in-house)	Name Tags & Prize Bags for Olympics
Service Project (community)	Community Flower Bed
Intergenerational	Exercise with 4th Graders
Outings	Walks at Community Park
Therapeutic Small Groups	Sports Objects & Sports Sounds
Independent	Sports Word Games & Prize Bags
Fillers	Forever Fit Videos

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The Celebration: Senior Olympics

- Frisbee Toss
- T-Ball
- Volleyball
- Darts
- Golf
- Dunk Tank
- Water Balloons
- Fish Pond
- 4th Grade Helpers
- Outdoor Picnic and more




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Involve Everyone...





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August 1 & 2



NOTICE:

All Regularly-Scheduled Activities are Cancelled

Please Report to Activity Room for a Private 30-min Meeting



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Country Western Month (Aug)

Movement & Physical:	“Western Moves – Roping” Exercise
Creative – Expressive:	WANTED Posters
Educational:	Red River Valley Lecture
Service Project (in-house):	Decorate the Red Garter Saloon
Outings:	County Meal Site – Western Meal & Cowboy Talk
Therapeutic Small Groups:	Cowboy Hats, Straw/Hay, Saddles
Fillers:	John Wayne Movies



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The Celebration: Red Garter Saloon



- Costumes borrowed from a county theater group.
- Residents got first dibs, then they assigned costumes and props to staff members.
- Evaluating the dresses, hats, and mustaches with residents was empowering (and hysterical!!)

Questions:

- Where can you borrow costumes?
- Which residents could serve on your ‘theme committee’



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- This was **not** a costume! Our 1.5 maintenance men lived for riding. They were the **heart and energy** of this month's theme.
- A jail was **built!** Criminals were **rounded up** by **lasso** – interrupting music, food, and conversations.
- Family members and residents **bailed out** each prisoner, using a select number of their allotted 15 peanuts.

Questions:

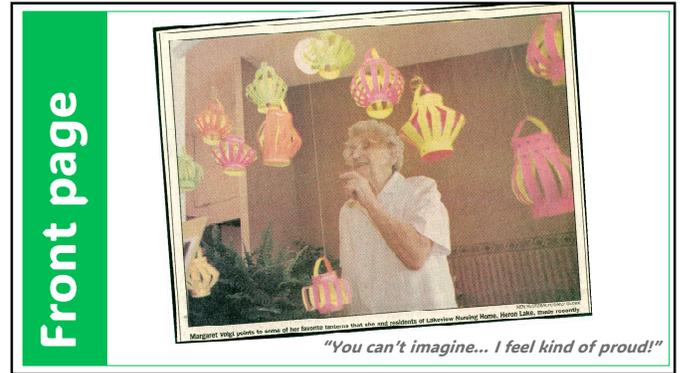
- What **elevates** your celebration into more than visiting, music, and eating?
- What is the **interactive and unexpected** component?



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Group exercise

<p>July: Missouri River Journeys</p> <p>Tie-ins:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> North Dakota Heritage: River crossings, fishing, ferries, steamboats, local reminiscing. <p>Purpose: A fun way to build on traditional summer activities. Think local reminiscing, cultural stories, sight-seeing (drive the Native American Scenic Byway and the Lewis & Clark trail), 'mapping the river' bulletin board, and talks about the Missouri River today...</p>	<p>Sept: September Skies</p>  <p>Tie-ins:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Turtle Mountain Chippewa Pembina Labor Day Pow Wow National Public Lands Day (Last Saturday in Sept) <p>Purpose: Celebrate the vast ND sky – a presence that has shaped farming families, elders, and the First Peoples who thrive in North Dakota. Think: Natural beauty, cultural stories, music, simple sky art, photography gallery, weather contests, music under the sky...</p>
<p>August: Mellow Yellow</p> <p>Tie-ins:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yellow as a symbol of sunshine, optimism, cheer and joy International Friendship Day (Aug) <p>Purpose: A fun and easy month to end the summer. Think 'yellow music,' lemonade stands, sunflowers, banana splits, sunshine stretches, yellow fashion show...</p>	<p>Oct: Rockin' the 80s: Hair Bands & Heavy Metal</p> <p>Tie-ins:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> October 13, 1982 Release of KISS <i>Creatures of the Night</i> album Rocktober – Radio / rock station gimmick month from 80s Halloween Overlap – Wild costumes, glam hair, KISS make-up. <p>Purpose: Validating and honoring the interests of some younger residents. Make it educational for all ages and tastes through "listen & learn" sessions. Helps activity professionals grow their music programming into the era of residents we are serving today.</p>

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ND Spotlight: Summer Fun! (Aug 2025)

Sheridan Memorial Home

- Introductions,
- How we met,
- Why a month-long theme?



Sheridan Memorial Home – McClusky, North Dakota

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Summer Fun!

- Summer tea party
- Fishing at the lake
- Flower canvas vases
- Flower bookmarks
- Pickling
- Enjoying the gardens & flowers
- Yard dart tournament
- Horse visit
- Eat a peach
- Camp supper with s'mores
- Burger Day
- Banana splits & games day
- Boat races
- Spa Day
- Bee baking
- Bee words

Calendar Tie-Ins

- National S'mores Day – Aug 10
- National Lemon Meringue Pie Die – Aug 15
- National Relaxation Day – Aug 15
- National Banana Split Day – Aug 25
- National Beach Day – Aug 30
- Eat a Peach Day – Aug 22
- Eat Outside Day – Aug 31
- National Honey Bee Day – (3rd Sat. of Aug)

Community Tie-Ins

- Sheridan Home gardens & flowers in full bloom!
- Community bringing fresh produce
- Staff member(s) with passion for horses

Courtesy of Sheridan Memorial Home – McClusky, ND

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Courtesy of Sheridan Memorial Home – McClusky, ND

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Courtesy of Sheridan Memorial Home – McClusky, ND

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Courtesy of Sheridan Memorial Home – McClusky, ND

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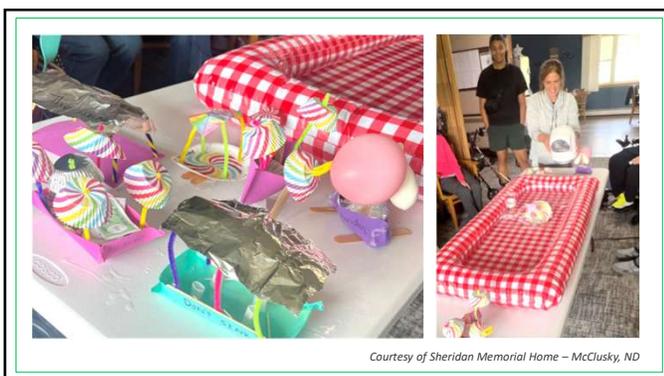
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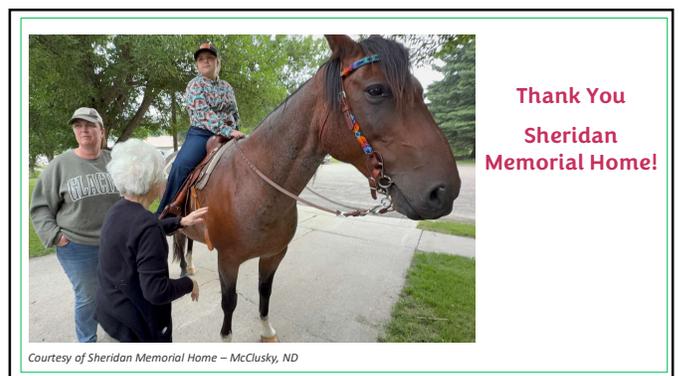
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Erin Bonitto, M.S., A.D.C., is a nationally recognized gerontologist, dementia communication coach, and founder of Gemini Consulting. Her behavioral coaching model equips interdisciplinary teams with practical, day-to-day communication strategies and behavioral insights for supporting individuals with dementia, psychiatric diagnoses, developmental delays, and other cognitive differences. Erin's 25 years in skilled nursing, assisted living, and memory care now also inform her growing work with teams serving adults who experience behavioral health challenges due to psychiatric diagnoses. Her coaching focuses on helping leadership and care teams prevent behavioral symptoms, reduce off-label antipsychotic use, and build a framework for joyful, genuine connection throughout the organization. Her work has been grant-funded, award-winning, and implemented across a wide range of communities – from large multi-site systems to deeply rural providers. In recent years, Erin has supported North Dakota providers through a statewide memory care workshop series in 2024 and an education and coaching tour of Basic Care communities in 2025. With decades of experience and a reputation for down-to-earth insight and skills, Erin has helped countless teams shift from reactive behavioral care to proactive, person-centered success.

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Contact Info

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