

AMERICA’S HEALTHIEST HOMETOWN

A weekly report on The Villages’ efforts to become “America’s Healthiest Hometown” compiled by Daily Sun Ombudsman **Larry D. Croom**. Email larry.croom@thevillagesmedia.com. Or call him at 753-1119, ext. 9366.

Contact The Villages Health at 352-674-1700 or visit the website at thevillageshealth.com.

Did you know?

Cynthia Stewart, a physician assistant at the Mulberry Grove Care Center, enjoys playing golf, horseback riding and working in her tropical garden.

Villages Health Q&A

Environmental Factors Play Role in Longevity

Besides possible genetic influences, do you believe that environmental factors like where a person lives plays a big role in longevity and good health?



One of the factors is, as much as where we live, what values does the culture in which we live promote? Is it one of activity, exercise, moderation of food, weight control? If you live in a culture that promotes these, such as The Villages, a better personal health status is a natural outcome. It may not be true for every individual, but health is maximizing your chances for a long and enjoyable life.

Dr. Saul Rosenblum, medical director, Santa Barbara Care Center



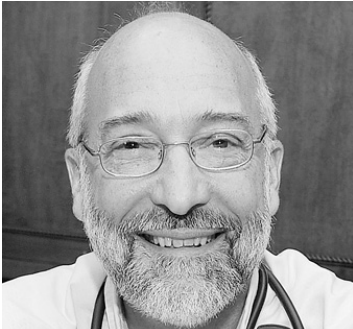
Without question, environment plays a major role in the determination of whether or not someone will develop certain conditions. Where a person lives will affect their lifestyle choices, their diet and the amount of activity that they engage in. All of these factors are very important in determining a person’s health outcomes.

Dr. Robert Reilly, medical director, Creekside Care Center



Absolutely. If you picked the right parents, don’t smoke, use alcohol in moderation and exercise regularly, you will probably hang out in The Villages for a long time!

Dr. Dave Jordahl, medical director, Colony Care Center



Certainly there are exposures to certain unhealthy or even harmful environmental factors which affect health. Children who live near high-traffic roads or highways may be found to have evidence of engine exhaust. Skin cancer is reportedly more common in regions where sun exposure is greater. Of course, the customs and dietary habits of a given geography can play a role as well.

Dr. Joe Hildner, director of medical affairs

Primary Care Centers in The Villages

- The Villages Health Colony Care Center**
280 Farner Place, 352-674-1710
- The Villages Health Santa Barbara Care Center**
1575 Santa Barbara Blvd., 352-674-1740
- The Villages Health Pinellas Care Center**
2485 Pinellas Place, 352-674-1720
- The Villages Health Mulberry Grove Care Center**
8877 S.E. 165th Mulberry Lane, 352-674-1750
- The Villages Health Lake Sumter Creekside Care Center**
1050 Old Camp Road, Building 100, 352-674-1760

Creating America’s Healthiest Hometown

Why is primary care so important?

“Primary care is the hub of health care. It’s wellness care. We want people to promote wellness. We don’t want to promote disease. We’re not here just to treat diseases. We’d like to prevent them altogether. Primary care gets that ball going and also keeps everything in balance. It is really like a juggler. You have a patient with multiple, comorbid conditions and keeping them all going in the air at one time without dropping something really takes a special talent. Primary care is that.”

Susan Bonenclark, physician assistant, Belleview Care Center



Photos by Bill Mitchell / Daily Sun

Dr. Laura Pratesi, right, an audiologist with The Villages Health, checks her grandmother, Miriam Mingledorff’s, left ear recently. Pratesi says one of her proudest days on the job was the day she fit Mingledorff and her other grandmother with hearing aids.

A special mission

Villages Health audiologist Pratesi truly understands her patients’ needs

By **LARRY D. CROOM**
DAILY SUN OMBUDSMAN

THE VILLAGES

Dr. Laura Pratesi is living her dream.

For starters, The Villages Health’s newest audiologist discovered the magic of hearing when she was attending college at Auburn. Born with a moderate-to-severe mixed hearing loss on her left side, Pratesi broke down in tears when she was fitted with a hearing aid by fellow music therapy and communication disorders students who were practicing their craft.

“I couldn’t believe the sound-quality difference,” said Pratesi, the youngest person ever to graduate from Auburn’s Doctor of Audiology program. “It was as if I had been underwater my whole life and, suddenly, everything was sharp and clear. It was just amazing.”

The fairy tale continued for Pratesi in 2011 as she and boyfriend William shared the lead roles in a production of “Cinderella” in Newnan, Georgia.

On the final night of the show – Pratesi’s birthday, no less – Prince Charming put the slipper on Cinderella’s foot, then led her to center stage. As he dropped to one knee, Pratesi’s eyes welled up with tears of joy.

“The lights come on, the curtain goes up and people start taking pictures,” said Pratesi, who can be seen in several YouTube videos of the special night. “I’m thinking, ‘What is happening?’ I was like, ‘You’re ruining the show. What is going on?’”

Seconds later, she knew exactly what was happening. Prince Charming pulled out a ring and made it official – Cinderella would be his bride.

“I wasn’t really someone who believed in soulmates,” Pratesi said with a smile. “But William is perfect for me in every way. We complement each other in our personalities. We amplify each other’s

strengths and support each other’s weaknesses.”

And finally, Pratesi’s dream of helping others has become a reality right here in The Villages, where the girl who grew up with hearing issues and became a doctor fully understands the importance of the help she offers to her patients.

“This is very personal,” she said. “I grew up in a very well-educated family with parents who loved me and had the resources to help me. We had access to very good health care and doctors. But I fell through the cracks. So I knew that if it could happen to me, it could happen to anybody in any walk of life.”

Since graduating from Auburn, Pratesi said she has had many special moments. But one truly sticks out.

“I fit both of my grandmothers with hearing aids and they’re both doing very, very well,” she said. “That day was when I felt the proudest about what I was doing. And I treat every patient as if they were my grandmothers.”

After graduation, Pratesi



The Dr. Laura Pratesi file

- Care centers:** Colony, Pinellas
- Age:** 27
- Undergraduate:** Auburn University
- Doctor of Audiology:** Auburn University
- Residency:** Columbus Speech & Hearing Center (Georgia)
- Certifications:** American Speech-Language-Hearing Association; Certificate of Clinical Competence – Audiologist (CCC-A)
- Fellow:** American Academy of Audiology

completed her residency training in Georgia and then spent almost two years working with the Ear, Nose & Throat Institute in Atlanta. But when she and her husband decided to move to Florida last year to be closer to family, The Villages Health quickly caught her attention.

“I was just blown away by the vision, the purpose, the philosophy,” she said. “I had not thought about being in with a primary care physician before. But I think it’s revolutionary and brilliant. They have such a wide variety of experience in so many different forms of medicine, and I think that’s really helpful to the patient.”

Pratesi, who sees patients at the Colony and Pinellas care centers, said a huge advantage is being able to diagnose hearing loss earlier.

“The number one reason why hearing aids don’t work for people is that they wait

too late,” she said. “The average patient waits seven to 10 years after they need help. But if they get a hearing screening here during their annual wellness check and they fail, we recommend a diagnostic hearing test. And we catch hearing loss before it’s at that crucial, critical point.”

Dr. Al Turri, director of audiology for The Villages Health, said he has been quite impressed with the skills Pratesi brings to the table.

“She’s the total package,” he said. “She’s bright. She loves people. And she’s passionate about audiology and hearing health care.”

Turri added that he believes Pratesi’s own experiences with hearing loss are making a difference in the way she handles her role.

“She has a unique perspective,” he said. “I can empathize, but she lives with it in the sense that she knows what patients are going through.”

Coming Jan. 25: Villages Health Specialty Care Center going strong after last year’s move from USF Health.