

Turning Activity 'Dreams' into Themes



Presented by:
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For:
OHCA
OHIO HEALTH CARE ASSOCIATION
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Welcome & Introductions

Erin Bonitto, M.S., A.D.C.

- Founder & Lead Coach of Gemini Consulting, Inc.
- Dementia Educator & Dementia Communication Coach
- Experiences in program planning

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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 & team members,
 - The larger organization,
 - The greater community.



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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,'
- 'Ohio Coconut Appreciation Month,'
- 'Cincinnati Coconut Groove Day'
- 'Appalachian Coconut Porch Day'

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

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Sample – 6 months

March: *Great Green Days*
Tie-in:
St. Patrick's Day
Purpose:
We are going to hang up a bunch of green stuff anyway...

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

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Sample – 6 months

June: *Something Old, Something New – Past & Present, Near & Far*
Tie-in:
June weddings
Purpose:
Grow in community by exploring how weddings are celebrated across time, place, and culture – partnering with staff and residents to share memories, traditions, music, food and style. Example anchor days:

- **Henna Hands & Flowing Dresses:**
Collaborate with Somali team members to host a Somali wedding 'show & tell day' with traditional and modern wedding attire, dresses worn by guests, henna designs, wedding songs, and favorite foods such as sambuusa (savory snack) and xalwo (a sweet confection).

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Sample – 6 months

- **Pierogies at the Parish:**
Explore Polish and Eastern European wedding traditions remembered by many residents and families – including parish hall receptions, wedding food favorites like pierogies and kielbasa, polka music, toasts and stories of long wedding days spent with extended family and community.
- **Wedding Songs & Sunday Best:**
Celebrate wedding memories centered around music, church, and community – featuring favorite wedding songs & dances, stories of 'Sunday Best' attire, church ceremonies, and the joy of seeing friends and family dressed up for a special day.

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Sample – 6 months

September: *Cleveland on the Big Screen*
Tie-in:
Global film festivals – Venice, Toronto and New York – all launch in September, giving fall a 'red carpet' energy.
Purpose:
Celebrate movies and TV shows filmed in or connected to Cleveland and Northeast Ohio, highlighting familiar films (A Christmas Story, Major League), recognizable Ohio-born stars, and Cleveland's long history as a filming location. Programming may include mini film clips, popcorn bars, DIY movie posters, and red carpet fun!

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Sample – 6 months

November: *Nuts, Harvest & Buckeye Traditions*
Tie-ins:
• Peanut Butter Lover's Month
• Fall Harvest
Purpose:
A simple, low-effort theme leading into the holidays, celebrating fall flavors and familiar Ohio traditions. Not only peanut butter-inspired activities, but stretched to include walnuts, buckeyes (the candy!), late-season harvest memories (corn, beans, apples), and easy kitchen-based activities.

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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, new and fun.

All residents, families, and staff are invited to contribute:

From Residents, Families & Staff

- Old wedding photos (framed 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, bowties)
- Honeymoon souvenirs or travel postcards
- Stories or copies of handwritten vows

From Staff & Community Members

- Wedding clothing or fabric (from your culture)
- Wedding dresses, veils, or garters tucked away in closets (dresses, wraps, beadedwork, 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 (henna, hair braiding, dances, blessing items)
- Marriage symbols (woven mats, carved figures, baskets)

How We'll Use Them

Items will be shared in displays, "showing, 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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Example: Country Western Month (Aug)

Country Western Month

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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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Front page



Margaret Vign poses to some of her favorite lanterns that she and residents of Lakeview Nursing Home, Brown Lake, made recently.

“You can’t imagine... I feel kind of proud!”

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“The halls of Lakeview Home are filled with art. No, it’s not by Picasso or Rembrandt. But if you any of the residents they’ll tell you about it with grins much wider than the Mona Lisa.”

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Lakeview artists prove it's never too late

BY BOB VAN ENKENVORST
(and more)

HERON LAKE — The halls of Lakeview Nursing Home are filled with art. No, it's not by Picasso or Rembrandt. But if you ask any of the residents of the home, they'll tell you about it with grins much wider than the Mona Lisa.

"They've provided the creative force behind the paper lanterns, wood carvings, wood work, watercolor paintings, clay sculptures and other projects displayed Saturday as part of 'Exploring the Arts.' For Margaret Voit it was the first time her art has been on display. Is she pleased with her clay sculptures and watercolor paintings?"

"You can't imagine. I feel kind of proud," she said.

Voit enjoys working on projects with her great-granddaughter, Stacy Kass, 11, who was also on hand for the event.

Even though the art show is over, she plans on keeping her creative juices flowing. "I still like to do it," she said.

Voit noted that residents didn't start any of the projects until early April. She then points at all the artwork.

"I just couldn't imagine that we did all that stuff," she said.

of one hand and limited vision. "He was just smiling and smiling when he was doing it," she said.

The desire to stay active was echoed by resident Esther Van Westen, who displayed her wood carvings and paintings.

"You might not be able to kick up your heels, but I did find out that you can almost dance with a walker," she said.

Van Westen enjoyed the chance to display her art.

"It's great. I love it. I'm just as big of a ham as anyone, I guess," she said.

See ARTISTS, Page A3

"They've provided the creative force behind the paper lanterns, wood carvings, woodwork, watercolor paintings, clay sculptures and other projects displayed Saturday as part of 'Exploring the Arts' Month."

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ARTISTS: Projects keep residents active, happy

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of one hand and limited vision. "He was just smiling and smiling when he was doing it," she said.

The art projects and show are an ongoing effort to allow the residents the chance to continue growing and learning, according to Erin Doucette, director of resident services.

And while some of the residents have lost dexterity in their hands, or their eyesight might have faded a bit, Doucette said, they still dove into the projects with enthusiasm.

"It's just something to see people overcome their limitations," Doucette said, pointing to a sculpture done by a man who has use

"It's great. I love it. I'm just as big of a ham as anyone, I guess."

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Erin Bonitto, M.S., A.D.C., is a nationally recognized dementia communication coach, gerontologist, and the founder of Gemini Consulting. For more than 25 years, Erin has partnered with assisted living, memory care, and skilled nursing teams across the country, helping them build practical and sustainable systems for dementia communication coaching and behavioral detective work that reduce frustration and prevent behavioral symptoms. Erin's hands-on coaching model has been linked to measurable reductions in off-label antipsychotic use, behavioral incidents, and staff injuries, while also improving family and team member satisfaction. Her work — often extending to individuals with psychiatric diagnoses and other cognitive differences — has been grant-funded, award-winning, and implemented across a wide range of communities, from large multi-site systems to deeply rural providers. Erin also works with organizations to build robust, interdisciplinary programming systems that provide pleasure, purpose, and peace to people living with dementia. Her real-world approaches to coaching and system-building have been described as the 'missing link' to culture transformation in aging services.

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