



Benchmark Senior Living's 'The Branches of North Attleboro' Embraces Technology to Elevate Human Connection

New assisted living and memory care community caters to seniors planning to stay engaged in the community.

WALTHAM, MA, Dec. 12, 2017 – In November, the first two residents moved into The Branches of North Attleboro, a 104-person assisted living and memory care community across from Triboro Plaza, becoming the 56th location for [Benchmark Senior Living](#), a leading provider of senior housing in the Northeast.

On Nov. 29, local dignitaries, including North Attleboro's State Representative Betty Poirier and State Senator Richard Ross, were on hand for the community's grand opening and ceremonial ribbon cutting.

"The Branches is a place where people will enjoy their lives, and they will have dignity," says Rep. Poirier. "And the food is out of this world!" More than 100 guests joined the opening celebration and enjoyed multiple stations of food and desserts prepared by award-winning Benchmark chefs.

"Very soon, neighbors and others in North Attleboro and surrounding communities can expect to see The Branches' residents out and about town," says Kelly Arnao, executive director of The Branches.

"It's important for residents to foster relationships not only with associates at our community and with each other but also with people in the North Attleboro community and beyond," she says. "Nearly all the residents moving in are from North Attleboro, Attleboro and northern Rhode Island, and they want to participate in local life."

Arnao and other associates at The Branches have been meeting in recent months with local officials and community groups, discussing how to forge connections beyond the walls of The Branches community. Department heads from Town Hall are scheduled to visit the community to recruit residents for volunteer positions, schoolchildren will come in to sing, and a different local chef will be invited to prepare signature dishes each month in The Branches' family kitchen. While The Branches will provide transportation for group outings, residents will also have special access to the ride-sharing service Lyft, giving them greater freedom to move around the area as they wish.

"This is a different generation," Arnao says. "Our residents have traveled the world. They're used to running their own lives, and we're adapting to that."

In Arnao's office is a poster with the silhouette of a resident at the center, surrounded by all the different groups with whom she and her team aim to foster connections. In addition to the community and neighborhood, the circle includes peers, caregivers and families. The layout and programming of The Branches were specifically designed to foster those connections:

- Residents have their own apartments and private bathrooms with a connected social space between apartments.
- In a special collaboration with Pawtucket, R.I.-based Hasbro, residents and families will enjoy participating together in pilot programs to test new games and activities in rooms stocked with classic Hasbro branded games.
- The ground floor of the community features an open layout with a dining room, lobby, library and outdoor patios, giving residents multiple opportunities to mingle. There's also a special corner area called "The Tap" where residents can sip wine and beer during the cocktail hour.
- And upstairs, there's a family dining room where residents can celebrate birthdays and holidays with friends and loved ones.

The Branches team is listening to residents' wishes as it plans activities. "We have people coming in saying, 'I want to do a short story book group,'" says Helen Hames, director of community relations. "Another person wants to start a walking club. One does judo. There's a perception that people go into assisted living and just play bingo all day, but there's a lot more to it."

Another factor setting The Branches community apart from many other assisted living communities is its enthusiastic embrace of technology. In addition to the Lyft service, the community also uses Caremerge, a mobile and web-based app, to keep families updated about their loved ones' daily activities.

The Branches is also running a pilot program where half a dozen residents are receiving Samsung tablets and live-in rooms outfitted with Google Home technology. "We're looking at senior-friendly technology to give our residents a better experience and keep them engaged," says Benchmark Applications Manager Tom Fitzpatrick.

The tablets come equipped with special software giving seniors access to relaxation apps, entertainment, games, news sources, email and web browsing – all with oversized icons for easy use. The tablets are connected to campus-wide Wi-Fi, and residents can use them to Skype with their families and browse daily activity schedules and meal menus.

The residents participating in the technology pilot live in rooms with voice- and motion-activated lighting systems, which are programmed to light up a pathway to the bathroom if residents get up in the middle of the night. Benchmark technologists are even considering how to incorporate virtual reality into programming – potentially allowing seniors to virtually "travel" to different parts of the world from their home at The Branches.

"The technology initiatives are all about providing more safety, making things more convenient and accessible, and connecting residents with their families and each other," says Arnao. "It's not about the technology. It's about creating positive human connection and experiences."

[The Branches of North Attleboro](#) is located at 40 Robert F. Toner Blvd., North Attleboro, Mass., 02763. For information, please call 508-455-5086.

About Benchmark Senior Living

Based in Waltham, Mass., Benchmark Senior Living is a leading provider of senior living services in the Northeast. Founded in 1997 by [Tom Grape](#) and celebrating its [20th anniversary](#) in 2017, Benchmark operates 56 senior living communities offering independent living, assisted living, Alzheimer's care and continuing care in Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Vermont. The company will open its first community in the state of New York, Whisper Woods at Smithtown, in 2018. Benchmark has been recognized as a top workplace by *The Boston Globe* for 10 consecutive years as well as by the *Boston Business Journal*, *Connecticut Post*, *Hartford Courant* and *Hartford Business Journal*. It has been named one of the healthiest employers by the *Boston Business Journal* and *Providence Business News*. Visit Benchmark at BenchmarkSeniorLiving.com.



The Branches Executive Director Kelly Arnao shares the scissors while State Senator Richard Ross, far left, and State Representative Betty Poirier, far right, hold the ribbon with Benchmark CEO Tom Grape and the first two residents of The Branches, Elma Underhill and Harriet Weintraub.



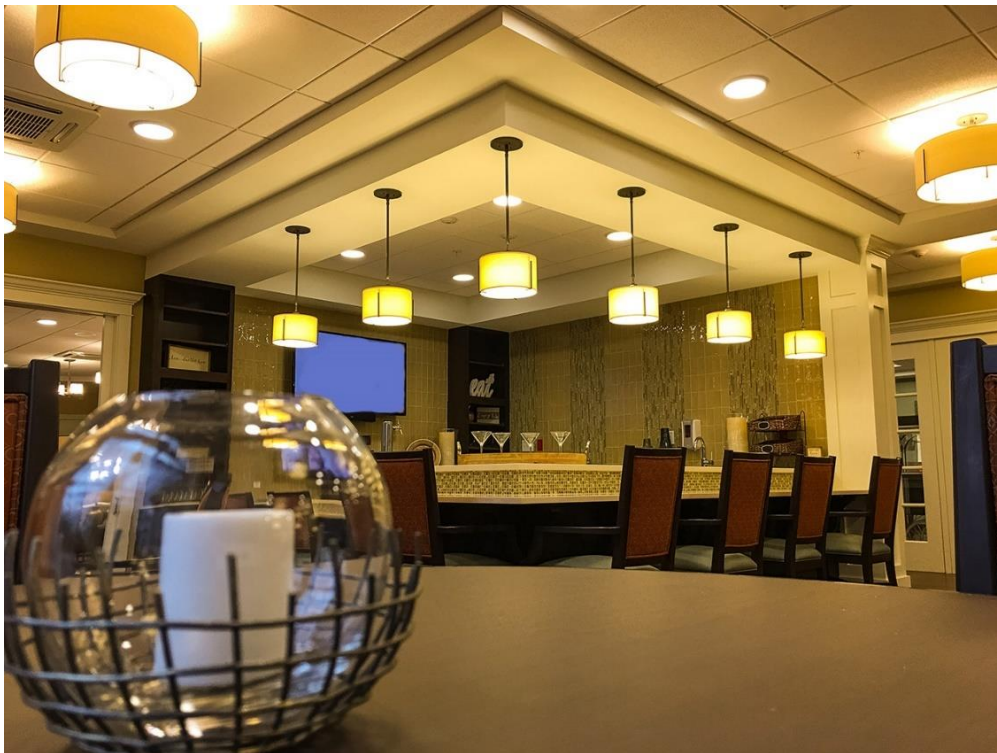
Everyone on The Branches staff was invited to join the team because of their experience in creating meaningful connections and their ability to Elevate Human Connection, the Benchmark mission.



The Branches offers a family dining room where residents can celebrate birthdays and holidays and connect with friends and loved ones. Photo courtesy of David Udelsman.



Comfortable sitting areas open opportunities for residents to connect with one another and their friends and family members. Photo courtesy of David Udelsman.



The corner gathering spot, The Tap, hosts evening cocktail time and daytime snacks.

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