



SALES AND MARKETING ROUNDTABLE #273: Building Bridges - Enhancing Senior Living Through Community Partnerships with Shane McDougall

Thank you to everyone who attended our latest Sales and Marketing Roundtable! To provide anonymity during the Roundtable discussion, participants and their communities will not be identified.

ABOUT OUR GUESTS

At this week's Roundtable, we were joined by Shane McDougall, Executive Director at Spring Harbor at Green Island.

Shane is a visionary leader focused on strengthening senior living through innovative community partnerships. In his presentation to the group, he shared strategies for partnership building that transform the way we engage with the community and enhance the quality of life for residents.



**“Your staff and your residents are your two
most important partners.” (Shane McDougall)**



FRESH PERSPECTIVES

- **OWNING THE OUTCOME** – Even when a service is outsourced, residents see it as part of the community. Success or failure in partnerships ultimately reflects on leadership, making accountability just as important as performance.
- **PARTNERSHIPS AS A GROWTH ENGINE** – From improved dining satisfaction to innovative music residencies, partnerships can directly drive occupancy, strengthen marketability, and position communities as leaders in care and lifestyle.
- **COMMUNITY VISIBILITY REQUIRES CONSISTENCY** – Just like Coca-Cola continues to advertise despite being universally known, senior living providers must continually invest in branding and outreach to remain top of mind locally.
- **MULTI-GENERATIONAL VALUE** – Programs that blend younger generations with older adults—like musician residencies—deliver benefits beyond enrichment. They spark connection, improve wellness, and build powerful marketing stories that resonate beyond the community.
- **NETWORKING AS STRATEGY, NOT AFTERTHOUGHT** – Chambers of commerce, city events, and peer gatherings aren't just “nice to do.” They're essential touchpoints that elevate senior living as a whole and ensure a community's voice is part of local conversations.
- **RESIDENTS AS PARTNERS, NOT JUST CUSTOMERS** – Involving resident councils in partnership decisions—whether for engagement software or programming—ensures services reflect what people truly want and need, while reinforcing trust and ownership.

LINKS & CONTACT INFO

Shane McDougall ([Linkedin](#))

Spring Harbor at Green Island ([website](#))

COMING UP ON VARSITY'S ROUNDTABLE!

Please join our next Roundtable gathering on Thursday, September 11 at noon ET, 11 a.m. CT and 9 a.m. PT. We'll be joined by Zack Collevecchio who will provide updated insights on the impact of AI on search.

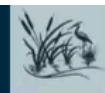
NEW ON VARSITY'S PODCAST, ROUNDTABLE TALK

On our newest episode of Varsity's Roundtable Talk, we sit down with Bridget Weston, CEO of SCORE, a nonprofit dedicated to mentoring and educating small business owners. Bridget has spent more than 16 years helping lead SCORE's mission, which has long relied on the expertise of retired and older mentors who bring decades of business experience to the entrepreneurs they serve.

Derek and Bridget discuss how SCORE pairs seasoned professionals with younger entrepreneurs, how older mentors stay engaged and purposeful through volunteering and the role of encore entrepreneurs (age 55+) in starting new ventures.

Check out the [episode here](#) on the Varsity website!





Spring Harbor at Green Island

Building Bridges: Enhancing Senior Living Through Community Partnerships

SPRING HARBOR AT GREEN ISLAND

Shane opened by saying how excited he was to discuss partnerships, both within Spring Harbor and the wider Columbus community. With a background in acute care at Piedmont Healthcare, he explained how Spring Harbor became part of the Piedmont family after Columbus Regional merged.

Asked to serve as interim director four years ago, he quickly realized he wanted the role permanently—something the team had been hoping for all along.

He described Columbus as a big city with a small-town feel, where partnerships are essential. Before moving on, he recognized key team members past and present who've been instrumental in building those connections.

Who Are We?



- Not-for-profit Life Plan Community that opened up in 2005 located in Columbus, GA about hour and half south of Atlanta.
- Only Life Plan Community within about 70 miles. One of fifteen in the state of Georgia.
- 196 Independent Living Units, 30 Personal Care Units, 30 Memory Care Units, 40 Skilled Nursing Licensed Beds



SPRING HARBOR AT GREEN ISLAND

Spring Harbor is a nonprofit life plan community that opened in 2005 and just celebrated its 20th anniversary with a cruise ship-themed party. Residents affectionately call it “the cruise ship that never leaves port.”

Located in Columbus, Georgia, right by the Alabama line, the community is well-positioned with little nearby competition—one of about 15 life plan communities in the state.

The campus includes 196 independent living units (including villas), 30 personal care units, 30 memory care units, and a 40-bed skilled nursing center. Coming out of the pandemic, growth has been strong, and for the first time, there’s even a waiting list for one-bedroom apartments—something the team celebrated with a round of applause.

Partnerships



- **Definition:** a formal or informal arrangement between two or more parties to manage or operate a business or achieve a common goal, share responsibilities, resources and profits or losses.
- **Goal:** Partnership agreement is where parties agree to cooperate to advance their mutual interests.

Amazing Partnerships

- John Lennon and Paul McCartney (The Beatles) shaped the future of rock and roll. Both great songwriters but both had different skillsets.



- Michael Jordan and Nike began in 1984 launched Air Jordan Brand. At that time both were taking a gamble. Turned Nike into a global icon for sportswear.

SPRING HARBOR AT GREEN ISLAND

Shane explained that partnerships are about shared responsibility and making sure both sides get value. At Spring Harbor, community partnerships are especially important, and they're reviewed regularly to ensure they're still mutually beneficial.

To illustrate, he used examples from music and sports. Lennon and McCartney were strong individually, but together they transformed rock and roll. Likewise, Nike's early gamble on Michael Jordan turned both into global icons. In each case, different strengths combined to achieve a bigger impact—just as Spring Harbor seeks in its partnerships.

Senior Living Partnerships Why?



- Partnerships play a crucial role in the evolution of senior living by enhancing quality, accessibility, and sustainability of care and services for all older adults.
- No one organization is perfect in all areas. Access to expertise becomes imperative for success.
- Focus Areas (Pillars Strategic Plan)
 1. Quality Care – Residents at core of all we do
 2. Driving Innovation – creating positive change by implementing new ideas
 3. Talent – Focus on employees
 4. Growth – Branding, Access for Seniors, partnerships, expanding services
 5. Stewardship - Operational Efficiency



SPRING HARBOR AT GREEN ISLAND

Partnerships in senior living became essential after the pandemic shifted everything—operations, staffing, occupancy, and finances. Communities had to rethink how to deliver care and meet rising costs while still staying true to their mission.

The value of partnerships lies in bringing outside expertise, strengthening sustainability, and expanding access for seniors. At Spring Harbor, partnerships are tied directly to strategic pillars: quality care, innovation, talent development, brand growth, access, new revenue streams, and financial stewardship. As the saying goes, great partnerships thrive because both sides truly need each other.

Selecting a Partner for your Organization



- Step 1: Understand your mission and vision for your organization. Culture and fit for Spring Harbor is always a first. Do they value what we value? Can the teams be successful together?
- Step 2: Alignment of needs and goals. Make sure you weigh out what is most important to your organization going into planning phase. It is money, satisfaction, or metrics needing to be hit. We know in today's world buying business is a real thing.
- Step 3: Understand what type of partner you need.
 - Strategic Partner – Healthcare system, marketing/branding, **community partner**
 - Operational Partner – dining, housekeeping/EVS, maintenance, HR/Legal
 - Financial – audits, mergers, capital funding
 - Technical – software systems in use



SPRING HARBOR AT GREEN ISLAND

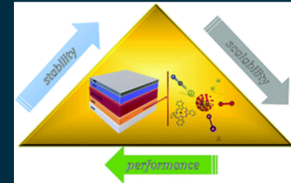
Selecting the right partner starts with understanding mission, vision, and culture. At Spring Harbor, cultural fit is always the first filter—if values don't align, the partnership won't work. From there, it's about clarifying needs and goals: is the focus financial, resident satisfaction, or hitting specific metrics? Being upfront at the beginning prevents problems later.

Potential partners typically fall into a few categories—strategic (like healthcare systems or marketing agencies), community, operational (dining, housekeeping, HR, legal), financial, or technical. Each type can play a role in strengthening the organization, whether that's improving infection control, boosting occupancy, managing audits, exploring mergers, or adding new technology.

Establish Evaluation Criteria



- 1: Values and Culture Fit – For Spring Harbor the residents are at the core of all decisions. Does this align with partner?
- 2: Capabilities and Expertise – have the right skills and knowledge
- 3: Track Record – Get references
- 4: Financial Stability – Are they sound and reliable
- 5: Communication and Transparency – Responsive, clear and trustworthy?
- 6: Scalability and Flexibility – Senior Living changes daily. Can they grow and adapt?
- 7: Legal and Compliance Alignment – legal, industry, and regulatory requirements?
- 8: Are they Spring Harbor in the residents' eyes?



SPRING HARBOR AT GREEN ISLAND

When evaluating partners, it's important to check alignment with values and culture, skills, track record, financial stability, and transparency. References matter, as does the ability to scale and adapt as needs grow.

Compliance is critical, but so is perception—residents should see contracted services as part of Spring Harbor, not as outside vendors. That sense of ownership strengthens trust and reinforces the feeling of home.

Spring Harbor Partnerships



- 1) Residents: Most important partner you will have in your community.
- 2) Staff: Most important partner you will have in your community. Not a typo
- 3) Families: We partner with our families everyday at Spring Harbor
- 4) Operational Partner: Dining, Therapy, and Podiatry Services
- 5) Vendors – Supplies, Food Vendors, contractors
- 6) **Community Partners** – Columbus organizations that align to further mission
- The majority of the time a partner will fall into one of these six categories of partner.

SPRING HARBOR AT GREEN ISLAND

Residents and staff are described as the two most important partners in any community—one provides the home, the other the daily care. Families are also central, often engaged from the first marketing conversation through the full continuum of care.

Operational partners like dining, therapy, and vendors support daily needs, while contractors and suppliers are carefully vetted for safety and quality. Finally, community partnerships—local or regional organizations that align with the mission—are highlighted as especially powerful in moving the organization forward.

Dining Operations (Partner)



- Situation: Dining was in a tough place, losing trust of residents, losing satisfaction, Started to hear outside of community
- 1) Focus Area: Quality of Care & enhanced services.
- 2) Opportunity: Increased resident satisfaction. Increased quality of food and oversight of regulations.
- 3) Result: Have gone from 44% satisfaction to 88% satisfaction.



SPRING HARBOR AT GREEN ISLAND

Dining became the first major area for partnership because it was directly tied to satisfaction and trust. When leadership arrived, the program was struggling—band-aid fixes weren't solving problems, scores were dropping, and the reputation in Columbus was slipping.

By bringing in a new partner, resident dining satisfaction climbed from 44% to 88% over four years. The change boosted occupancy, strengthened marketability, and reshaped the community's image. Updates like a casual dining space and a full liquor license appealed to younger residents and turned dining into a centerpiece rather than a pain point.

A key takeaway: once a partnership is chosen, the organization must fully own the outcome—success or failure still reflects on Spring Harbor.

Columbus State University The Joyce and Henry Schwob School of Music



- Situation: Four years ago, I read a great article about a multigenerational program with college students living in senior living community.
- Musicians in Residence Program
- 1) Focus Area: Expanding Services/Driving Innovation
- 2) Opportunity: Increased Resident Satisfaction. Improved wellness socialization opportunities. Marketing
- 3) Result - Starting 4th year of program with growth in new area.



- <https://www.facebook.com/100044451836530/videos/pcb.1296897615135287/723120443398501>

SPRING HARBOR AT GREEN ISLAND

A standout partnership has been with Columbus State University's Schwob School of Music, which led to the creation of a "musician-in-residence" program. Graduate students live on campus rent-free in exchange for concerts, educational programs, and resident engagement. The arrangement has boosted wellness, socialization, and satisfaction, while also serving as a powerful marketing tool.

Now in its fourth year, the program has expanded into memory care through a new "Healing Notes" initiative, adding even more value. Beyond the performances, the multi-generational connections—students sharing meals, joining activities, and socializing with residents—have become just as meaningful.

This partnership has not only enriched life at Spring Harbor but also generated national visibility, even landing features in the School of Music's magazine. It's a clear example of how creative collaborations can deliver cultural, clinical, and business benefits all at once.

Clingstones Double-A Baseball



- Situation: New baseball stadium opened in Columbus that is affiliated with Atlanta Braves. Approached team to serve seniors in community.
- 1) Focus Area: Growth – occupancy
- 2) Opportunity: Increased focus of branding and marketing within our own community. Top of mind presence for senior living.
- 3) Result - Have seen some traction already from presence.



SPRING HARBOR AT GREEN ISLAND

Another recent partnership has been with Columbus's new Double-A Braves baseball team. With the excitement of a new stadium, Spring Harbor saw an opportunity to strengthen local branding and community presence. Despite assuming the community already "knew" them, leadership realized visibility takes constant effort—just like Coca-Cola continues to advertise despite universal recognition.

The team partnered on a senior night promotion, created branded collateral with QR codes to track engagement, and even brought the team mascot into the community for resident events. The result has been stronger name recognition, phone inquiries, and a fun, high-visibility way to stay top of mind in the local market.

WTVM or News Stations



• Columbus Georgia Chamber of Commerce Leadership

- Situation: Team wanted to push our name and brand as much as we could without paid dollars.
- 1) Focus Area: Growth
- 3) Opportunity: Increased presence with community partners. Improved relationships.
- 4) Result - Community partners attending ribbon cutting and posting on social media. Increased awareness for Spring Harbor.



SPRING HARBOR AT GREEN ISLAND

Community partnerships extend beyond formal programs—they also come from active networking. Staying connected with the chamber of commerce, local leaders, and peer organizations keeps Spring Harbor visible and helps elevate senior living across Columbus.

Opportunities like ribbon cuttings, executive director gatherings, and even early morning TV spots all serve to share the message of quality senior care. Inviting partners into the community and showing up for citywide events strengthens relationships and ensures Spring Harbor remains part of the broader conversation.

Spring Harbor Community Partners



- Piedmont Columbus Regional
- Columbus Clingstones
- Columbus State University Schwob School of Music
- Pet Partners of Columbus
- LeadingAge Georgia
- Greater Columbus Chambers of Commerce
- Rivercenter
- Rotary Club of Columbus
- Alzheimer's Association
- Columbus Hospice
- Piedmont John B. Amos Cancer Breast Cancer Awareness
- Columbus and the Valley
- Goodwill
- Valley Rescue Mission
- Bridge of Columbus

SPRING HARBOR AT GREEN ISLAND

Partnerships also extend into sponsorships, with careful attention to alignment with mission and values. Spring Harbor supports organizations like Goodwill and Valley Rescue Mission, ensuring unused resident items are put to good use in the community. Larger partnerships, such as with Piedmont, are also evaluated through the same lens—every sponsorship or collaboration must reinforce the organization's vision and purpose.

Senior Living Partnerships Summary



- Evident from this presentation, partnerships are not just beneficial for senior living organizations – they are essential to the future of senior living.
- The needs of aging populations with baby boomers coming into play grow more complex, no single organization can effectively meet them alone.
- Collaborative ecosystems foster innovation, resilience, and can create a higher standard of living for seniors.
- No one organization is perfect in all areas. Access to expertise becomes imperative for success.



SPRING HARBOR AT GREEN ISLAND

The key takeaway is to evaluate partnerships annually, ensuring they continue to deliver value for both sides. Community focus not only strengthens services but also grows brand and business. No organization can be perfect in every area, so finding partners with the right knowledge, scalability, and alignment is essential to moving the needle and achieving long-term goals.

QUESTIONS

WAS THE STRUCTURED VETTING PROCESS FOR PARTNERSHIPS SOMETHING CARRIED OVER FROM PIEDMONT AND THE PARENT ORGANIZATION, OR WAS IT DEVELOPED AS A SET OF CRITERIA SPECIFICALLY AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL?

Some criteria were already in place at Spring Harbor, but much of the structured vetting approach came from experience at Piedmont, particularly around aligning every partnership with mission, values, and vision. That framework was adapted at the community level, with added emphasis on making sure partnerships are just as valuable for residents as they are for operators. Resident councils are actively involved in evaluating new initiatives, since they're the ones directly engaging with many of these partnerships.

DOES ANYONE ON THE CALL HAVE ANY PARTNERSHIPS THAT THEY'D LIKE TO HIGHLIGHT?

One community highlighted its 20-year-old senior university program, a partnership with the University of Washington, Pacific Lutheran University, and the University of Puget Sound. Professors teach free classes open to residents and the broader community, boosting engagement and visibility while also leading to move-ins.