

 SENIOR HOUSING NEWS

# CHANGEMAKERS 2022

The **pioneers** driving the **future** of senior living

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# Leading the Evolution of Senior Living

Senior living continues to evolve at a rapid rate — an evolution largely defined by the risks and innovations of top industry leaders who put the needs of patients, families and staff above all else. In a period of great transition, this type of leadership is critical to the clinical, technological and operational advancements needed to thrive in today's senior living landscape.

We're pleased to honor our 2022 class of Changemakers in this collection of exclusive, never-before-seen interview excerpts from a series brought to you by Senior Housing News in collaboration with Yardi. Read on to learn about how 2022 Changemakers view and manage change, and how they are preparing to reshape the industry in the years to come.

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Visit [seniorhousingnews.com/changemakers](https://seniorhousingnews.com/changemakers) to read the full series.





**Joel Nelson**  
*President and CEO*  
**LCS**

Rising through the ranks at LCS, one of the nation's largest senior living organizations, Joel Nelson played a key role in starting the company's real estate business. As president and CEO of LCS, he is now responsible for leading all business lines in the LCS Family of Companies, which includes an operating portfolio of more than 130 communities.

Nelson is a major proponent of change in areas such as workforce and wellness, and a more unified approach to industry advocacy, and he believes great change will be achieved by implementing the lessons learned from Covid. Nelson is also focused on combatting the staffing crisis by making senior living an industry-of-choice for prospective employees, as well as driving change through efficiency and technology.

**What changes do you think need to be made in the industry during the next 3-5 years?**

The list is long, but I would break it into three buckets: The lessons we learned through COVID; the need for greater efficiency; and technology implementation.

What we learned through COVID is that we're a misunderstood, fragmented industry, and we don't do a very good job of telling our stories. We have to get out and not only tell our success stories, but also explain the impact those successes are having on our families and residents.

I think workforce and career opportunities are unlimited. How do we become an industry employer-of-choice versus, "I fell into this by accident" — and you've heard that a hundred times. In order to tell our story, another lesson learned from COVID is that we have to unify on data and data aggregation.

Next, we have to get more efficient as an industry with respect to how we deliver services and amenities to our residents. We talk about the industry being fragmented, and I think all of the providers and the majority of capital partners are striving for the same thing — vibrant communities, lifestyle, great outcomes with residents and strong health care components.

I think we have to unify and get more efficient in how we represent the industry. We're a relatively large industry when you compare pharma, auto, et cetera. We're represented through four different associations ... I want to compliment the association executives' efforts ... but it's just inefficient. We need a way to build a stronger voice within our audiences.

The last area is technology, and that's technology in our buildings, our service delivery and data management. Almost every function and part of our businesses will continue to use some form of technology, and it will shape the future with the right balance of human connection and efficiency.



**COMPANY HEADQUARTERS**  
**Des Moines, IA**

**CHANGEMAKERS 2022**

**3 KEY TAKEAWAYS**

A word of advice for managing resistance to change in your organization or team?

 **Listen.**

If you could change one thing about the senior living industry, what would it be?

 **Less fragmentation.**

What's the single-greatest driver of change in today's senior living operating environment?

 **Consumers.**





## Tom Grape

Founder, Chairman & CEO  
Benchmark Senior Living

Founder, Chairman and CEO Tom Grape has led Benchmark and its more than 6,300 associates to achieve over \$2.5 billion in company value and \$550 million in annual revenue. Under his leadership, Benchmark leverages the power of human connection to transform lives at every stage of life.

Grape is dedicated to attracting a more complex consumer and delivering on their evolving needs. He is also on mission to increase diversity at the leadership level, both within his organization and in the senior living industry at large.

### What are some ways you think the senior living industry needs to change in the next five years?

I think our industry is still in an immature stage. We need to catch up to where the market is, and by that I mean I think our consumers are demanding a lot more change than we're currently providing. That's going to rapidly accelerate as the baby boomers move from adult children to residents. I think all the constituencies we touch or serve are demanding more and better things from us, and we are playing catch-up on all fronts. Our industry needs to get out in front of these needs.

### As you look across the rest of the senior living industry, in light of the things that you've said, do you feel like it's changing fast enough to keep up with the times?

No, I don't.

Progressive and innovative industries attract the best talent — thought leaders who solve the problems you put in front of them. We've never been thought of as a bastion of innovative change. There are areas in which we need to be upfront if we're to become the place that people want to come to work.

We have solutions for some of these things, but we're playing catch-up on too many fronts. Our industry can be a beacon of innovation and our products and services warrant it, but we aren't quite there yet.



COMPANY HEADQUARTERS  
Waltham, MA

# CHANGEMAKERS 2022

## 3 KEY TAKEAWAYS

A word of advice for managing resistance to change in your organization or team?

 **Start with 'why,' read the timing in terms of other organizational demands and pick the right people.**

If you could change one thing about the senior living industry, what would it be?

 **Have our product/service received in a more universally positive fashion.**

What's the single-greatest driver of change in today's senior living operating environment?

 **Consumers.**





**Jane Arthur Roslovic**  
 CEO  
 Treplus Communities

Jane Arthur Roslovic has been in the real estate development and investment business as a managing member of Treplus Communities since 2012. Under her leadership, Treplus has focused on meeting the needs of active adults and the discerning baby boomers who desire flexibility, carefree living and upscale, single-story living spaces.

Roslovic has led her team in creating a progressive strategy to target baby boomers and their children in an evolving senior living landscape. She has also established her organization as a leading innovator and developer in the rapidly growing active adult sector.

as successful as he was because we could not afford to pay for the kind of care he gets. We have to work on these costs. The whole industry, us and the ILs, ALs and MCs, have to be realistic about it because not all of them can move in with their kids.

**If you could change one thing about the Senior Living industry, what would it be?**

Cost.

Listen, when you're getting old, you care about two things: your family and your financial stability. That's so scary to me, and I've seen the cost modeling of the senior housing industry. I have a 93-year-old father, and my family is very fortunate that he was



**COMPANY HEADQUARTERS**  
 Columbus, OH

# CHANGEMAKERS 2022

## 3 KEY TAKEAWAYS

A word of advice for managing resistance to change in your organization or team?

 **Approach change thoughtfully. Be cognizant of who you're impacting and how people are going to react. Be aware that not everyone will immediately embrace change, and make sure your communications are clear.**

If you could change one thing about the senior living industry, what would it be?

 **Cost.**

What's the single-greatest driver of change in today's senior living operating environment?

 **The growth of the aging population.**





## Tana Gall President Merrill Gardens

Tana Gall has followed a distinct path in her decades-long senior living career. From rising through the ranks at Leisure Care, she went on to lead Merrill Gardens as the operator's president. She next became an entrepreneur and founded a senior living consultancy before taking on the CEO position at Blue Harbor, ultimately returning to Merrill Gardens as president in November 2019.

Gall's trademark as a Changemaker is her approach of bold-but-calculated risk-taking, which is reflected in the new and growing middle-market brand Truewood by Merrill. She has learned to embrace and drive change by leveraging her diverse background in property management and private equity.

### How do you see technology both driving and enabling change in senior living?

The way we import and report data is critical to enabling change today. We're able to identify the holes in our system and create a strategy to make things better using that data.

We were very paper-based when I started in the industry, and today, I am literally pressing a button to see how things are growing in virtually every department. I don't underestimate the power of technology when it comes to data analytics. I think we have a ways to go in how we share data, but at Merrill Gardens, I've utilized it a lot in order to enable change.

There's a lot of cool resident-facing technology out there as well, but first we have to determine if our residents will find value in it. I have to see where the return on investment is and understand how it's going to make the residents' lives easier or better. I would love to see more technology that covers all the bases to make operations more efficient. Technology can enable a lot of change, but it can also slow things down.



COMPANY HEADQUARTERS  
Seattle, WA

# CHANGEMAKERS 2022

## 3 KEY TAKEAWAYS

A word of advice for managing resistance to change in your organization or team?

 **Embrace it.**

If you could change one thing about the senior living industry, what would it be?

 **The labor challenge.**

What's the single-greatest driver of change in today's senior living operating environment?

 **Consumers.**





## Bryan McCaleb

President  
Sagora Senior Living

Bryan McCaleb is the President of Sagora Senior Living, an organization focused on serving residents, meeting their needs, and exceeding their wants. He joined Sagora in 2006 and has helped lead the company through changes and growth, to its current portfolio of 57 communities offering independent living, assisted living and memory care.

McCaleb has developed an “associate-first” mantra within Sagora, empowering the organization to rapidly scale in a competitive senior living landscape. It resulted in a significant push to promote internal team members, putting the right people in place to optimize the efficiency of each team. He is also focused on the need for senior living at a more accessible price point and is trying to meet that goal through targeted acquisitions.

### What are some ways in which you think the senior living industry needs to change in the next five years?

When I started in the industry, it was pretty black and white in terms of what you could expect. That has changed over time, however, and the industry today is driven by choice. At the same time, I don't think we're even close to the level of choice the boomers are going to expect, and that needs to change.

The average age in our communities is increasing, and as that happens, residents will be looking for more ways to stay active longer. We can't just create places to live, we have to create places to thrive that deliver on lifestyle needs.

There will also be more partnerships with health systems. In a lot of our markets, we've spent years trying to build not just referral relationships, but genuine relationships. That takes hard work and trust.

Even coming out of covid, we built a lot of trust with health care systems because of the ways we helped them. As we move forward, I think that silver lining will serve as the foundation of our health system partnerships.

Additionally, our industry has enough data to tell the story of our organizations so partners and prospects can connect with it. That story will have to change as new consumers come into the market, and we're not quite there yet.



COMPANY HEADQUARTERS  
Fort Worth, TX

# CHANGEMAKERS 2022

## 3 KEY TAKEAWAYS

A word of advice for managing resistance to change in your organization or team?

 **Confidence.**

If you could change one thing about the senior living industry, what would it be?

 **Image.**

What's the single-greatest driver of change in today's senior living operating environment?

 **Competition.**





## Amy Schectman President and CEO 2Life Communities

In more than a decade leading 2Life Communities, Amy Schectman has worked to create a vibrant strategic plan, created a quasi-endowment to support agency innovation, built and nurtured an effective team at all levels of the organization, and launched an aggressive expansion campaign to fill the gaps in the senior housing affordability marketplace.

Schectman has championed the power of diversion, equity and inclusion initiatives within her organization and the industry at large, and she is tackling the

affordability gap in aging America through 2Life's new Opus model. Schectman has also prioritized preparing for the next aging generation and the new needs they bring to the marketplace in order to drive change at scale.

### What are some words of advice for managing resistance to change in an organization?

Listen to what's happening on the ground, and listen to the people who are on the front line, seeing people every day. They're going to sense that long before people who are sitting in the CEO spot, in terms of what people are going to need, what people are going to want and the direction the winds are going to blow. They know it better than we do. Follow their lead, empower them to tell you, empower them to really be part of the planning and part of the structure.

If I were running a traditional CCRC, I would be talking to the CNAs constantly. I would have a group of advisors that included CNAs, occupational therapists, physical therapists, nurses and social workers — those are the people who can see what's driving the market. On the Opus project, I had the idea to implement volunteerism as a key part, and I will say, people thought, "Is she crazy?" Then we tested it in the market and it tested really well.



COMPANY HEADQUARTERS  
Brighton, MA

# CHANGEMAKERS 2022

## 3 KEY TAKEAWAYS

A word of advice for managing resistance to change in your organization or team?

 **Listen to what's happening on the ground, and listen to the people who are on the front line, seeing people every day.**

If you could change one thing about the senior living industry, what would it be?

 **Affordability.**

What's the single-greatest driver of change in today's senior living operating environment?

 **Social justice.**





## Dale Watchowski President and CEO American House, REDICO

Changemaker Dale Watchowski has more than 30 years of real estate expertise in both local and national platforms, with a diverse background in acquisitions, development, capital markets and operations. He has also held senior management positions at some of the nation's largest financial institutions including Travelers/Citigroup, HSBC, and J.P. Morgan Chase, and he currently serves as president and CEO of American House and its parent company REDICO, in addition to others.

Through his transition from commercial real estate to senior living, Watchowski became a master of adaptation, and he is constantly searching for new ways to morph his business to best serve the consumer. Watchowski has built a strong leadership team in alignment with his vision for change, and it is a key differentiator for American House and REDICO in a competitive senior living landscape.

The industry was very quick to standardize and find economies or efficiencies. I think that's good and needed, but at the end of the day, standardization doesn't enable you to recognize the needs of the individual. That's really what differentiates us from others and makes us a great company and a great place to live.

### What are some ways in which you think the senior living industry needs to change in the next five years?

I think the industry needs to start thinking about each community as serving a different need. Each of our 72 communities will have its own character, and I have to believe that each individual within those communities will have unique needs. I'd like to think of our business as a business that serves the needs of the individual, and while there needs to be some corporate discipline and standards, we have to take into consideration the community specifically that we're serving.



### COMPANY HEADQUARTERS Southfield, MI

# CHANGEMAKERS 2022

## 3 KEY TAKEAWAYS

A word of advice for managing resistance to change in your organization or team?

 **Change is inevitable. It's going to happen at a very rapid pace, so you best be comfortable with it.**

If you could change one thing about the senior living industry, what would it be?

 **The standardization of the industry.**

What's the single-greatest driver of change in today's senior living operating environment?

 **The changing character of our resident population.**





## Danette Opaczewski

*EVP, Resident Experience and COO*  
**Revel Communities**



Danette Opaczewski is the EVP, Resident Experience and COO of Revel Communities, an independent living brand developed by The Wolff Company. After an extensive career in hospitality, Opaczewski joined Revel in January 2020 and assumed overall responsibility for the operations and financial performance of the management company.

Opaczewski leans on her background in hospitality to drive customer-centric change by redefining the resident experience in senior living through the introduction of technology, enhancement of resident amenities, and offering tools that empower seniors to live happier and healthier lives. She is also an advocate for diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives to make change within her organization and across the senior living industry as a whole.

### Do you feel the industry is changing fast enough to keep up with the times?

I have witnessed a great amount of progress in the span of two years, with the pandemic playing a crucial role in how the industry has evolved. Covid demanded that the industry address some of its institutional challenges, such as adopting more technology and wellness services that strengthen the health of our communities.

I was quite shocked by the lack of integrated technology across the industry, and beyond our teams, only 50% of our residents wanted to engage with technology. To date, 80% of our residents have adopted the use of technology, as a result of our efforts in introducing initiatives such as online price transparency and virtual tours, to name a few. The challenge is continuing to foster such technology driven services and amenities for the growing boomer generation.

As we look to the future of 55-plus independent living communities, I believe there is more change ahead in how we are attracting boomers and making a collective effort on evolving the market perception towards aging and senior living.



**COMPANY HEADQUARTERS**  
**Scottsdale, AZ**

# CHANGEMAKERS 2022

## 3 KEY TAKEAWAYS

If you could change one thing about the senior living industry, what would it be?

 **The market perception of aging.**

A word of advice for managing resistance to change in your organization or team?

 **Dig deep and keep going.**

What's the single-greatest driver of change in today's senior living operating environment?

 **The prospects themselves.**





## Jesse Marinko

President and CEO  
Phoenix Senior Living

For over 20 years, Jesse Marinko has worked in the senior housing industry, holding multiple positions with major brands such as Sunrise and Benchmark before launching Phoenix Senior Living in 2014.

As an entrepreneur, Marinko is no stranger to change, and he has been working diligently to serve the middle market more efficiently and effectively in the coming years. He is far from risk avert but takes a calculated approach to change with respect to timing, strategy and infrastructure.

### How do you innovate without getting so far ahead of the market that a new idea doesn't work?

If you want change, the captain can never leave the helm of the ship. You have to stay there and be willing to answer all the questions, all the rebuttals, all the whys, all the nos. If you believe in change, you have to spearhead it because change is never convenient. You're never going to be ready for change. I was never ready to start Phoenix. Paul Klaassen was never ready to start Sunrise. At some point, you just make the decision to do it. Wherever the hell the chips fall, they fall.

I've pushed and initiated many change programs that were out of the norm. I got a lot of questions and resistance, but I thought we could pilot it in one location, then roll it out across all 60 if it worked.

Timing will never work in your favor. Just start the dialogue, work through the problems and questions, come up with solutions and be receptive to their feedback. The program might not necessarily be exactly how you envisioned it, but as long as the intent of the initiative is still intact, that's all that matters.



COMPANY HEADQUARTERS  
Roswell, GA

# CHANGEMAKERS 2022

## 3 KEY TAKEAWAYS

A word of advice for managing resistance to change in your organization or team?

 **In the battle of rock and stream, water always wins due to persistence.**

If you could change one thing about the senior living industry, what would it be?

 **Employee recognition and development.**

What's the single-greatest driver of change in today's senior living operating environment?

 **The labor market.**



# Wendy Nowokunski & Jim Coughlin

The Northbridge Companies



The Northbridge Companies CEO Jim Coughlin and President Wendy Nowokunski founded the organization on the principle of doing well by doing good. And through much change over the last 30 years, they have remained true to that intention.

With Nowokunski and Coughlin at the helm, The Northbridge Companies have been able to push the envelope of change across its 20 senior living communities while mitigating the risks for all the impacted stakeholders. They have also developed several forward-looking diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives that differentiate The Northbridge Companies in a competitive labor market.

### Do you feel the industry is changing fast enough to keep up with the times?

**Jim:** Right now, capital partners and operators have clearly recognized that there's not a one-size-fits-all product. I think we're moving from a generalist phase to a specialist phase, where we'll be in a position to give the consumer a myriad of products to choose from.

Financial approaches such as rental versus entrance fee versus buy-in are changing as well. That's exciting to watch and participate in, even within our own portfolio. We're operating a CCRC now, which is new to us compared to our traditional rental approach. We are looking at development deals, and I think that's going to be the next frontier, and it's not like others haven't done it in the past, but I think having operators like us explore that and execute on that will be exciting.

**Wendy:** From before Covid to after Covid, we saw our team collaborating like never before. Everybody has become more dedicated to the residents, to each other, and that has even extended beyond our walls.

Some of the biggest operators pulled together in order to get a huge supply of PPE. The associations were on top of it with protocols and so forth, and if there's any good that came out of Covid, I think that's it. We already overcame a crisis together, so we are ready to take on the next.

COMPANY HEADQUARTERS  
Burlington, MA



## CHANGEMAKERS 2022

### 3 KEY TAKEAWAYS

A word of advice for managing resistance to change in your organization or team?

 **Wendy: Listen.**  
**Jim: Don't give up**

If you could change one thing about the senior living industry, what would it be?

 **Wendy: Perception.**  
**Jim: Increase the workforce.**

What's the single-greatest driver of change in today's senior living operating environment?

 **Wendy: The changing consumer.**  
**Jim: Consumer preference.**

 SENIOR HOUSING NEWS

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