SENIOR LIVING

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# Building with Purpose: MorningStar Senior Living

In a free market of goods and services, the best brands are those rooted in mission and heart, ones that intentionally advance ideas essential to shaping a better world. This is the kind of brand MorningStar Senior Living aspires to be.

At its founding in 2003, Ken Jaeger felt called to create something different – a company in which he could get to know his team on a deeper level, learn what was most important to them and, by doing so, transform their lives and the lives of those around them. He started by focusing on core values important not only in the Judeo-Christian tradition but to human flourishing. *How do we resolve to live virtuously and reap the relational benefits of that?*

Out of his personal convictions and leadership style, Ken established three pillars for the MorningStar mission: Honor God in our business practices and relationships; value all seniors as gifted and contributing individuals; invest generously in his team's ability to serve well.

Twenty-one years later, MorningStar has become a landmark name in senior living as a fully integrated developer, owner and operator. Its portfolio spans 38 operating communities in 11 states with three more under construction and four in development; its total portfolio valuation stands at around $3 billion.

In its home state of Colorado, the company has grown to 14 communities since opening its first in Littleton. The three newest are MorningStar at Observatory Park (April 2023) and MorningStar at Holly Park (March 2024) in Denver and MorningStar at Old Town in Fort Collins (June 2024), for a total project cost of around $150 million. Inclusive of its home office and with the opening of Old Town, MorningStar's employment count is about 1,300.

In recognition of his company's growth and innovative branding, Jaeger won in 2016 Entrepreneur Of The Year in the Mountain-Desert Region within the category of Healthcare and Life Sciences. EOY is a global competition sponsored by Ernst & Young.

Jaeger insists that honoring God is what has made MorningStar successful and what unites its stakeholders in a shared higher purpose. "It's about maintaining the critical balance between margin and mission," he explains. "Standing up for goodness; committing to do the right thing all the time, not just when it's convenient … families as much as investors are looking for a brand with that kind of clarity and integrity."

The best companies are also those intentional about building a Culture defined less by what we do and more by *why* we do it. *Radiance* gives MorningStar a framework through which to empower its team to be servant-hearted.

Jaeger quotes the company's core values, "Love, respect, honesty, fairness, goodness, kindness: These are the ways by which we want to do business, offer care and build family for life. These are the virtues we want evident in our homes."

Through *Radiance,* MorningStar fosters a culture where collaboration trumps titles, and where kindness and relationships are paramount. Every team member appreciates the impact he or she can have on others. "Our people are encouraged to explore their gifts and become better servant-leaders," Jaeger says. "And when you transform the person, you transform the team."

A deeper motivation is uncovered when asking the team, "Why work with seniors?" The answers are remarkably similar: "Because I know these residents, I am changed for the good." Says one, "The way seniors talk about their lives sometimes sounds like fiction, but when you look into their eyes you know it is true. The way their generation lived – the way they shaped the path for us to live – should be remembered and followed." That makes for work that matters, teaching as we are being taught, encouraging as we are being encouraged, bonding through the acknowledgement of life's best gifts.

MorningStar also prioritizes ways in which to make an impact beyond its walls. Jaeger and Managing Partner Matt Turner have walked the path of poverty many times in developing nations. Each trip has been a profound experience, raising their sights on the magnitude of influence the company might have around the world for those who hunger and thirst.

In this spirit, the MorningStar Foundation was established in 2019 to formalize abiding support of philanthropic initiatives that align with the values and priorities of the company. Presently the ministries supported are Casa Bernabé in Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua, and Lifewater International.

Adds Jaeger, "When seniors and families come into our communities, they see our *Love Knows No Bounds* artwork of children around the world whose lives we are supporting. It's evidence of our commitment to leave a legacy of benevolence and grow our base of caring hearts who choose to get involved."

MorningStar is as committed to giving back locally. We see volunteerism with local nonprofits as another way to live out our mission and culture of *Radiance.*

Jaeger couldn't be more excited about the future of his company and its unique brand position. "We set the bar high at MorningStar, wanting to be more than a senior living company. By the depth of our convictions and the strength of God's grace, we are resolved to make a difference in the world with purpose-driven, servant-minded leadership."

As we reflect on our history, as we look to future opportunities before us, a few things are clearer than ever. What seniors need is what we all need: significance, value, love. The mission we are on, we are on together to serve seniors, each other and the world.

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Lorna Lee
*Vice President, Marketing & Communications, MorningStar Senior Living*
llee@mstarliving.com