

History & Legacy of St. Francis Manor

St. Francis Manor is celebrating two big anniversaries in 2022 – 45 years as a care facility and Dion Schrack serving as administrator for 40 of these years! It's hard not to tell both stories simultaneously as Dion's professional legacy accounts for many measurable additions to the campus over the last four decades.

The new St. Francis Manor building replaced two older intermediate-care units, one located at Grinnell General Hospital and another in the old St. Francis Hospital. According to an article in the Grinnell Herald Register, the name, St. Francis Manor, was chosen by the hospital trustees as "a tribute to the Sisters of St. Francis and St. Francis Hospital which provided dedicated health care to the Grinnell community for so many years." The first 48 residents moved into the new 51-bed facility in February 1977 and today over 275 people live on the well-maintained 31-acre campus. St. Francis Manor became a community non-profit organization in September 1980 after separating from Grinnell General Hospital. On January 1, 1982, Dion became Administrator at the age of 23.

"Since St. Francis Manor is a free-standing nursing facility with no contract with a management company, Dion has been responsible for the management, marketing, financial accounting, human resources, personnel recruitment, master planning, survey and regulatory compliance, and legislative lobbying for over 40 years," said Fran Conn, Chair of the St. Francis Manor Board of Directors. "Dion has a heart bigger than life and a compassion for people that doesn't stop. His vision, past and future, of St. Francis Manor, Seeland Park, and the Hammond Center are great examples of his devoted life-long work as administrator. We can never thank him enough for all he has done and continues to do."

Over the years, St. Francis Manor and the St. Francis Manor Foundation have raised over \$2 million toward the dream of creating a complete life plan community where seniors would have all the options in retirement and care needed from independent living to assisted living to the nursing facility. During this process, countless projects and services have been created under Dion's leadership most notably including:

- Three Certificate of Need approvals for adding facility beds making St. Francis Manor a 78-bed skilled nursing facility;
- General Contractor for construction of Seeland Park independent living residences consisting of 53 duplexes, 23 apartments, and 16 single-family homes;
- Addition of Community Services of St. Francis, a private home health care agency;
- Organization of the St. Francis Manor Foundation, a 501(c)3 organization;
- In 2010 launched a three-year, \$5.25 million addition and remodel of the nursing facility and resident rooms including the addition of an on-site Rehabilitation Clinic which offers in-and out-patient therapy services; and
- Developed a 20-bed assisted living addition.



Most recently, the Hammond Center for Assisted Living, named in honor of Montie and Betty Hammond, former and current Board Members of the St. Francis Manor Foundation, opened on March 4, 2019 when its first tenant, Leila Maring, was welcomed to her new home. Dion's vision was finally realized through the hard work of many, and even when these major accomplishments are something to be celebrated, the biggest impact to Dion has always been the people.

Dion's proudest accomplishment is using his God-given talents to help and care for people. "I have taken care of a lot of people over my 40 years and I'm grateful for the relationships I have with many residents' family members," said Dion. "In fact, I am now caring for the second generations of families. Hopefully, I will be able to retire before I get to the third generation!"

“Our entire family is grateful to Dion and St. Francis Manor for all of the guidance, support and care of our loved ones. Starting with our grandmother and then our father and mother, he welcomed generations of our family into a safe and loving environment,” said Marsha Nieland, daughter of former resident Evelyn Felper. “He was always available to answer our questions and eager to help us figure things out. His kind nature, warm smile and big hugs were medicine for the soul. In those very tender and sometimes challenging times, it was such a relief to have someone like Dion to guide us through uncharted waters. Our family members could sleep better at night knowing our loved ones were in the capable hands of his staff and that Dion was only a phone call away.”

Dion credits having great board members who are progressive and community-minded to his longevity at St. Francis.

“Roger Zimmerman was chair of the St. Francis Manor Board of Directors when I was hired and I remember hearing years later from Roger’s wife, Mary Jane Zimmerman, that Roger came home that night and said he just hired a kid to run St. Francis,” laughed Dion. “I also remember the board meetings were held over the lunch hour and our dietary staff served the board members a meat and potatoes dinner. After several months, Roger said to me that they didn’t need such a big meal and could just have a tossed salad as they’d done in the past. I smiled and told Roger that the dinner meal was cheaper to serve than lettuce salad and I was watching the food costs! I think Roger knew he hired the right kid for the job!”



In addition to Zimmerman, other community leaders serving on the board when Dion began as administrator were Dick Seeland, Jim Tedford, Jim Tederman, Bernice Mithelman, Mary Flanagan and Allyson Sawtell. Those currently serving on the Board of Directors of St. Francis Manor, Seeland Park and the Hammond Center are Fran Conn, Kent Brown, Lee McFee, Gary Shebeck, Connie Scurr, Sammi Bryan, Lindsey Warnick, Mike Thorndike and Teryl Ver Ploeg.

“It has been my pleasure to get to know and work with Dion. I admire his passion for the residents at St. Francis Manor,” stated Barb Baker, St. Francis Manor Foundation inaugural board member, former Chair and current board member. “I don’t think his mind ever stops thinking about what can and should be done to make improvements in the quality of life for the St. Francis Manor community members. His vision and spirit for the assisted living facility were ground-breaking in many ways, and has brought a much-needed facility for an under-served population in our community.”

As for the future on campus, Dion would like to see single family homes built on the last five lots of Seeland Park’s Phase VI. Dion also strives to have financial stability of all the campus entities and to keep attracting the best employees to continue providing the best services in a very difficult regulatory and work environment.

Dion was raised in Tama and graduated from South Tama High School in 1976. He received his Associates Degree from DMACC at Boone before attending Florida International University in Miami, Florida, for hospital administration. After a year, Dion decided hospital administration wasn’t his calling and he came back to Iowa and completed a 9-month internship through DMACC before testing to become a licensed nursing home administrator in 1980.

“You might say being an administrator was in Dion’s blood as his grandfather was administrator of Tama Nursing Home and his mother, Rosie Schrack, was a nurse and long-time administrator at Sunny Hill Care Center in Tama where Dion worked while attending college in Boone,” commented Dion’s wife, Shelley.



Dion and Shelley have been married for 32 years and they have two daughters—Mariah (Alex) Karumuna and their son Kyler who live in Bondurant and Maddie who is a sophomore at Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa. “Our girls grew up working in the nursing home,” said Dion proudly. “They both started as dietary aides when they were 14 years old and then became certified nurse aides soon after they turned 16. The residents are always glad to see Maddie when she works at St. Francis Manor during her college breaks.”

“My greatest satisfaction is when customers, family members, or community residents talk about the great service they received or witnessed from my staff,” stated Dion. “I am very blessed to work with a great staff with caring hearts.”