

# WORKING HER WAY BACK TO Health

## One Woman Helps Inaugurate a New Therapy Gym

While Luther Manor's therapy staff are regularly praised, the therapy gym's location and space were not ideal prior to 2024. Rehab needed some rehab, you might say. The therapy gym received it as part of Phase 2 of Luther Manor's Project Revitalization.

Now named The Lantern, the gym opened in March 2024, and **Colette** is one of the first clients to use it. A resident of a senior community in Menomonee Falls, 86-year-old Colette spent six days in the hospital following a fall in the bathroom. With a compound fracture and two screws in her right leg, Colette transferred to Luther Manor's short-term stay unit for rehab.

With a healthy dose of humor and a friendly demeanor, Colette quickly got to know the therapists, including **Melissa Haakenson**, a physical therapy assistant who works with Colette. (Luther Manor contracts with Select Rehab for therapists.) Because Colette cannot put any weight on her right leg, she is using therapy to strengthen her left leg and upper body. For example, using one piece of equipment called a rickshaw, Colette works to strengthen her triceps. This increased strength will help her safely sit down and get up from a chair.

With Melissa and the other therapists at Luther Manor, Colette also learns how to safely get into and out of a car and a bed. Therapy helps Colette "get comfortable with the different scenarios she might have when she goes home," Melissa said.

## BETTER SPACE, BETTER EQUIPMENT

Patients like Colette now have the benefit of a larger, more organized, and better equipped gym. Equipment upgrades include the stairs and parallel bars, and in addition to the rickshaw with which Colette exercises, a set of pulleys are now in use. To improve balance, a table that can be raised for standing tasks has been added. An updated kitchen allows patients to practice everyday tasks in preparation for a safe transition home.

The environment has also improved. With a wall of windows, the therapy gym is bright and airy. Because outside access is available, patients can practice moving and exercising outdoors in the fresh air.

"It's so cheerful. When you think of therapy, you think, bleh. But it's not down there. It's fun. For me at 86 to say it's fun –" Colette laughed. "I'm not a real exercise guru at all but we have the best time down there. Maybe I shouldn't say that. But we do!"

In fact, conversations, joking, and camaraderie fill the room.

"The interaction is fantastic. We usually get quite a few conversations going across the gym," Melissa said. In this way, therapy provides emotional as well as physical healing.

## LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

In addition to the enhanced space and equipment, the location of the gym also improves patient care. The gym is centrally located on the ground level for both residents in the Health Care Center and The Courtyards. As a result, some residents are able to walk to therapy, leading to greater independence. It also means a more efficient use of time.

"Even though it was just one elevator ride down one floor, you're also sharing that elevator with every other employee in this facility as well as the kitchen. That wait takes away the patient's minutes," Melissa said. "So taking that aspect out of it is increasing the time we have with the patients."

The location of the therapy gym is important in a symbolic way, too. It no longer resides in the darkness of a basement but instead sits on the ground level, brightened by sunshine. Aptly named The Lantern, the therapy gym serves as a source of light and hope for those in rehab.

After experiencing what for some can be a painful, even traumatic experience like a surgery or accident, residents can feel broken, hopeless, or depressed. Just as a lantern illuminates a few feet at a time, Luther Manor's new therapy space helps residents light their way towards recovery, slowly and steadily, one day at a time.



