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Alzheimer's patients and others with dementia can re-arrange a piece of Velcro-backed art work at the Madera Memory Support facility. Fred Randolph, Sonora administrator, gives a demonstration.

# Sonora's Alzheimer's unit filled with subtleties for complex care

## CIRCULAR SIDEWALK, MEMORY DISPLAY CASES, BRIGHT COLORS AND LIGHT WITHIN NEW FACILITY

By DAVE PERRY  
*The Explorer*

**A**lzheimer's is "a disease in detestability that ranks up there with cancer," in the view of veteran senior care provider Fred Randolph.

"There is no commonality to that type of disease," said Randolph, administrator of the Sonora Health Center at Splendido in Rancho Vistoso. At different paces, dementia patients enter "a long, disorganized, depressing descent," discouraging "especially for the family members who watch a person disappear before their eyes."

Sonora is about to open the 12-suite Madera Memory Support facility, where people with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia can be helped in an evolving form of health care.

It's difficult care, because "we don't know what you're thinking," Randolph said. "We know how you behave. We should provide the care like the whole person's still there. With great intent, we want to know everything that's permitted about what their life was like, what they hoped life would be like, and try to accommodate them. We take the journey with these folks."

Madera has been built with wide hallways, plenty of light and color, and accommodations not found in other long-term care facilities.

For example, the Madera unit has a unique sidewalk within a sheltered desert garden. Some memory loss patients walk, and walk, and walk, for reasons not yet clear. So the sidewalk is circular, allowing them to walk without leaving a watchful eye, and because dementia patients "don't know how to cope with dead ends," Randolph said.

Dishware is brightly colored. For whatever reasons, patients prefer it.

There is a bathtub with a sliding sidewall for access. "Oftentimes, they develop a fear of water," Randolph said. "And showers. We don't know why."

Outside each room, Madera has a memory display cabinet with glass shelves upon which family members can put photographs, collectibles and other items from someone's life that might trigger memories. "It sort of celebrates their history," Randolph said.

On the wall, a piece of large artwork depicting a village is made of Velcro-backed pieces, so residents can arrange the village however they'd like.



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Fred Randolph's image is reflected in a memory case in Sonora's Madera Memory Support facility.

Employees in the memory loss facility "must enjoy it," Randolph said. "They must have infinite patience and incredible powers of observation. It's a disease of subtleties and rituals and routine."

Randolph describes Alzheimer's as "scary." At Sonora, he added, "at least you still have your dignity."

Randolph came to Tucson last November from Yuma, where he operated a 150-bed nursing home. He has worked in senior care for many years.

"I'd almost rather do that than anything else in the world," he said of the work. "I find older, mature citizens just fascinating." And they are almost immediately grateful for assistance.

"Someone, a month ago, came in here scared and sick," he said. That person "won't ever go home, but said 'my life isn't bad.' Somebody cared, did something, and that person is taken care of. I get paid to create that."