

Follow the signs

Faith Marabella, CEO of Wellesley Design Consultants Inc., found a passion for sparking joy in others through interior design



Many may know me for my colorful shoes, quirky glasses, and funky style. Well, more about that later ...

Much of my path to senior living was

happenstance, as life often is. I was eager to enter the world of design after graduating with a bachelor's degree in architecture from Iowa State University. I interviewed for my first "real" job in 1997, at a firm that specializes in senior living. At the time, I didn't realize this was an industry that would interest me. But I remember asking at the interview, "How do you know when you've achieved a successful design for the end user?" Right away, I was interested in advocating for the resident, who I knew may not be involved in the design process. After some time working for that firm, I felt I didn't have an impact that reached the resident. Our projects met all the codes, budgets, and programs and clients were happy, but a human connection was missing.

After seven years, I decided to take a break from design. I went back to school, got licensed as a massage therapist, and put out my shingle. But happenstance happened again. One year later, an interior design firm in Somerville, Mass., that specializes in senior living reached out to me to cover for a vacationing employee. Within two weeks, I was encouraged to stay on. I ran my licensed massage therapy business part time as I devoted more and more hours to interior design. This time, it felt different: Being one of the last project team members on-site, tending to the details of art, accessories, and window treatments, I was often still there



as residents settled in. I'd chat them up, learning what brought them there, what they like, and what they didn't. I finally found the human connection I craved.

After three years, the partners of the firm were looking to retire at the same time a perfect buyer came along for my massage therapy business. All signs were pointing toward a new career path. I think if I hadn't taken a detour through massage therapy school, business courses, and real-life business operations, I would have been overwhelmed and run in the opposite direction. Instead, I said yes, becoming CEO of Wellesley Design Consultants Inc. (Methuen, Mass.) in 2010, which has put me in touch with some amazing people in the senior living community. Their passion is contagious. I found my people.

For me, delivering dignity through design is the goal, but so is happiness. And happiness is elusive. The familiar phrase, "In the

pursuit of happiness," is easier said than done. There's a lot that goes into it beyond meeting basic human needs. I like to design in a little whimsy, an unexpected twist. The ultimate insult in our firm is to design "beige-ecture." Our humor, laughter, and light-heartedness translate to our tools of pattern, color, and texture.

And yes, that's why shoes are my thing. I love their design. They're the foundation of how I meet the earth. Over the years, it's become less about the shoes and pretty much about the joy they bring others. It reminds people to have a little fun. Crack a smile. Be quirky. It's a great way to design, live, and spark joy in others. **EFA**

If you're interested in sharing the story of what ignited your passion for senior living design, contact Executive Editor Anne DiNardo at anne.dinardo@emeraldexpo.com.