

## **Assisted Living Federation of America announces its 2009 Best of the Best Awards.**

“This year, there were a lot of submissions focused on human relations, such as training initiatives or going the extra mile to ensure employee support for the direction the company wanted to take,” says **Richard G rimes**, ALFA’s president and CEO. “But all of these entries speak well of the great desire by so many great companies to be heralded by their own people as an employer of choice.”

### **Category: Human Resources**

#### **Winner: Signature Senior Living**

#### **Irving, TX**

#### **Ambassador Partner Program**

**Azalea Trails Assisted Living and Memory Care Community opened in Tyler, Texas**, a couple years ago with a talented management team and a growing clientele. The only problem was that it tended to lose too many caregivers within the first three months of employment. Despite best efforts to hire and train the right people, “it wasn’t clicking,” says **Sharee Cummings**, vice president of employee partner relations for Signature Senior Living.

In response, the community’s leadership team gathered some of the community’s most dedicated caregivers—or “employee partners”—to help brainstorm solutions. The employee partners’ guidance, in essence, was to let them do the hiring.

The advice made perfect sense. “They know many of the people coming in. They know their own jobs,” says Cummings. After being saddled with extra work because of high employee turnover, she added, stable employees were eager to help. “They were frustrated, too.”

Out of that initial exchange, a new Ambassador Partner Program was born and quickly spread to other Signature properties. Senior employee partners were selected to undergo special training to help interview, screen, and recommend their future coworkers. Ambassadors also let job candidates shadow them for a day (pre-hire), and conduct orientation, training, and mentoring of new employee partners.

The ambassadors’ professionalism and dedication has been impressive. Cummings credits the new program with cutting staff turnover at Azalea Trails to 6 percent. Employee and customer satisfaction survey scores have improved. For Cummings, the most satisfying result has been its effect on employees in general, many of whom have applied to become senior care partners and/ or ambassadors.