

Merrill Gardens President Tana Gall connects with 89-year-old resident Gerry Worth, who has used videoconferencing to see her loved ones during COVID-19.



# A WELCOME SIGHT

Videoconferencing tools keep senior living communities engaged and connected with the outside world — and each other.

BY MELISSA DELANEY  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICK DAHMS

**G**erry Worth isn't inclined to slow down. The 89-year-old was a ballroom dancer and skier, she learned how to ice skate in her 70s, and as recently as last year, she was taking college classes.

In March, however, her senior living community, Merrill Gardens at Kirkland in Washington state, implemented safety protocols — including restricting outside visitors. As nursing homes and assisted living facilities nationwide experienced some of the earliest COVID-19 outbreaks, Merrill Gardens moved quickly to limit residents' exposure to the virus.

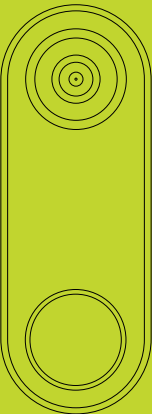
These days, Worth continues to practice social distancing inside her private apartment. But she isn't lonely: She makes regular video calls to her children and grandchildren around the country, thanks to a partnership between Merrill Gardens, CDW and Google, which donated 1,000 Google Nest Hub Max 10-inch smart displays to the Seattle-based senior living company.

"I'll tell you, without Google, I would be very unhappy," Worth says. "This has given me a chance to see to family. I see my friends. I see three operas on Saturday, I get the news, I get musicals. I love it. I don't feel isolated."

With people of all ages confined to their homes, videoconferencing hardware and software use has exploded during the COVID-19 shutdown. Online work meetings, telehealth and distance learning have become standard.

But the visual technology has offered a special lifeline to older adults, who are the most vulnerable to the virus.


"One of the positive things to come out of COVID was this videoconferencing boom," says Scott Smith, director of education and experience at Atlanta-based Thrive Senior Living, which has communities in Alabama, Georgia, Texas and along the East Coast. "We've even been connecting people to family members that they hadn't been seeing regularly before the virus."



## TECH SENIORS WANT

An AARP survey asked people 50 and older what smart home tools they are interested in using:

- 59 PERCENT** Front-door cameras
- 48 PERCENT** Door and window monitoring
- 42 PERCENT** Appliances with automatic shut-off
- 39 PERCENT** Fall detection/emergency alerts
- 38 PERCENT** Thermostats



Source: AARP Research, "2020 Tech and the 50+ Survey," December 2019

The shift is widespread, according to the American Health Care Association's National Center for Assisted Living.

"Nursing homes and assisted living communities are making every effort to keep residents connected to their loved ones, their doctors and specialists, and the community at large during the pandemic, and technology is playing a major role in safely facilitating this," says association spokesperson Beth Martino, adding that additional support from policymakers could support more long-term investments.

### FROM PERK TO PRIORITY

Thrive's newest community, Tribute at Black Hill, in Germantown, Md., opened its doors on March 2 only to have to close to visitors 10 days later.

"There are some families who had never even been inside the building," says Jodie Edwards-Taylor, president of Tribute at Black Hill. "So, we look at creative ways to make sure that the families get to at least visit virtually with their mom or dad," she says.

Both Thrive and Merrill Gardens helped residents make videoconferencing calls before the pandemic, but only on an informal basis and infrequently. Once the pandemic hit, Thrive staffers found helping residents make video calls became their most time-consuming task: They'd have to find a spare tablet or smartphone, set up the call and stay throughout the conversation in case there were technical issues.

"We wanted to do something that was more resident-driven versus team member-driven, where a family member felt they could make a call any time to check in on mom or dad, and the resident felt they could make a call out any time," explains Smith.

That was the plan even before the March shutdown. Smith had a trip planned to Tribute at Black Hill, where he was set to launch a pilot using the Amazon Echo Show — an all-in-one



## SMART TOOLS IN ACTION

Even as senior living communities ease up on some quarantine restrictions, video devices remain essential to help new residents meet their neighbors.

Smart displays such as the Google Nest Hub Max and Amazon Echo Show also engage older adults in other ways. Users may set timers, ask trivia questions, watch videos or play music. They can even control smart lightbulbs, thermostats and other home tools.

Those functions boost safety, says Scott Smith, director of education and experience at Thrive Senior Living. Most falls happen at night or in the morning, so if residents don't need to get out of bed to adjust the temperature or turn off a light, it can reduce the risk of injury.

Maplewood Senior Living, which operates communities in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts and Ohio, supplies voice-activated smart home technology at each residence that allows seniors to teleconference and alert the care team.

This spring, Maplewood rolled out advanced artificial intelligence robots at all of its locations. The 3-foot-tall machines, which have four wheels and 10-inch tablet "faces," enable users to speak via video with their relatives.



smart speaker and 7-inch touch screen that can conduct video calls. His flight was canceled because of the virus, so the community kicked off an informal launch.

Thrive chose the Echo Show because of its cost-effectiveness and simplicity. Residents can tell the voice-activated devices what they want them to do instead of having to find and click on different apps, says Smith.

The Google Nest Hub Max, a tabletlike display console, is also voice-activated, and Google customized some for Merrill Gardens users.

Teams interviewed Merrill Gardens staff, residents and family members to understand their familiarity and comfort level with new technologies, and they worked with CDW to tap into its expertise of providing technology for active adult populations, says Heather Clancy, global enterprise partnerships lead for Google's devices and services team.

"We also learned how effective it was to identify a champion within the community to help get their peers excited about learning a new technology," she adds.

Tana Gall, president of Merrill Gardens — which operates communities in Washington and 19 other states nationwide — believes videoconferencing will soon be the norm in senior living.

"I think before, we thought of it as a luxury that would be a neat thing to have," she says. "Today, we're seeing it as more of an essential. It's been a game changer in keeping residents connected."

### PLANNING FOR TOMORROW

In designing a solution for Merrill Gardens, Google teams focused on simplifying deployment for administrators — including enabling remote fleet management and a custom administrative console — and making

the devices as relevant and easy to use as possible for a senior population, Clancy explains.

For instance, it uses a larger font size and a hands-free experience for seniors with dexterity or hand mobility issues that make it hard to hold a smartphone or tablet.

Both Thrive and Merrill Gardens plan to offer preset videoconferencing devices to future residents. "One of the things we learned is it has to be plug and play," Smith says. "Anything that has to be done on the family side creates frustration."

As usage increases, communities must ensure their networks are ready. Merrill Gardens has been retrofitting older concrete buildings so that it can upgrade wireless networks.

"We always put Wi-Fi throughout the common areas, but we didn't really do it in the apartments," Gall says. "Today, that's an expectation."

Westport, Conn.-based Maplewood Senior Living recently upgraded its locations in Southport, Conn., and New York City to fiber, and it plans to follow suit with the rest of its communities by early 2021.

"Fiber connectivity allows us the option to scale up quickly if we need more bandwidth, and it provides large increases that are more stable," says Tom Caprio, the organization's IT director.

That's important as the company plans to introduce new tools to further engage residents.

"It is easy to assume seniors who did not grow up in a world with iPads, cellphones, computers and robots could not relate to the software available today," says Gina Saunders, corporate director of memory care and programming at Maplewood. "However, that is not the case. That generation is an extremely intelligent and curious one. We see technology change lives for the better every day." ■

**\$30 billion**  
The projected 2022 market value of smart technologies for seniors, including smart living, remote care and fitness devices, three times the 2019 valuation<sup>1</sup>

→ Smart technologies have big potential at home. Read how CDW outfitted a residence for adults with disabilities at [healthtechmagazine.net/SmartHome](https://healthtechmagazine.net/SmartHome).



# Virtual Visits with Apple and Jamf

Protect providers and connect patients and families - no logins, passwords, or IT required

With global shortages on PPE, what if care could be delivered without ever entering a patient's room? What if families could be connected to their loved one from the safety of their own home?

Virtual Visits powered by Jamf makes this possible. Healthcare organizations can now configure and deploy third-party conferencing platforms such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams to Apple devices for providers to make virtual rounds to patients — or for patients to stay connected with their loved ones.

Discover how Jamf helps healthcare organizations succeed with Apple



800.800.4239 CDW.com

# ONLINE

## ADDITIONAL WEB INFORMATION

[web tease CTA/vanity URL points to] <https://healthtechmagazine.net/article/2020/02/how-easterseals-outfitted-smart-home-residents-disabilities>

[article type – Nav Bar] Feature

[web hed] Videoconferencing Has Become a Lifeline for Senior Living Communities

[print hed] A Welcome Sight

[teaser/web dek] Tablets and smart-home tools keep older adults engaged and connected with the outside world — and each other.

[CDW segment: MedLar, SMB, retail, finance, nonprofit, energy and utilities, healthcare, K-12, federal, higher ed, state and local, CSM –capital and securities markets, sports and entertainment] Healthcare

[main category] Hardware

[subcategories] Digital and Video Cameras, Collaboration, Patient-Centered Care, Patient Experience, Patient Privacy, Training, Tablets, Wi-Fi

[CDW VV2 strategy: cloud; mobility; security; data center/networking; collaboration; core/software/internet/hardware/classroom/BI/public safety/management] Hardware

[customers/organizations] Merrill Gardens

[brands/partners] Google, Amazon

[industry] n/a

[states] Washington, Georgia, Connecticut

[buying cycle: awareness, engagement, purchase, nurture] Engagement

[CDW MKT ID] MKT14U695

[author] Melissa Delaney

[author bio] on file

[pull quote] “This has given me a chance to see to family. I see my friends. I see three operas on Saturday, I get the news, I get musicals. I love it. I don’t feel isolated.” – Gerry Worth, 89, Resident, Merrill Gardens at Kirkland

[photo credit] TK

[links] n/a

[3 tweets]

A partnership between @MerrillGardens, @Google and @CDWCorp helped seniors in isolation use videoconferencing to connect with family and online entertainment.

Smart home devices have big benefits in senior living: “I see my friends. I see three operas on Saturday, I get the news, I get musicals. I don’t feel isolated,” one 89-year-old says.

Videoconferencing in senior living communities is no longer a perk — it’s essential. Learn why:

[handles] @MerrillGardens, @Google, @CDWCorp, @ThriveSL

[keywords] Tablets and senior living, tablets for seniors, videoconferencing for seniors, amazon echo for seniors, google nest hub max for seniors, older adult video tools, videoconferencing and retirement communities, wi-fi and senior living

[html title]

Video Tools and Devices for Seniors in Isolation: How Residences Stay Connected

[bulk list/digital contacts] TK