

**FAMILY FRIENDLY:**  
Peter and Phyllis  
Flemming with their  
children, Peter Jr.  
and Laura.

WINNER  
**Garden Terrace  
Nursing Home**

REVENUE UNDER  
\$10 MILLION

**FOUNDED:** 1964

**HEADQUARTERS:** Chatham

**OWNERS:** Peter and Phyllis Flemming

**BUSINESS:** Nursing home and adult day-care center

**EMPLOYEES:** 45 full- and part-time

**FAMILY MEMBERS EMPLOYED:** 4

**GENERATIONS ACTIVELY INVOLVED:** 2

this feels like home," says Laura Collins, daughter of Peter and Phyllis Flemming. Maybe that's why the family often hears Garden Terrace referred to as the bed and breakfast of nursing homes.

The roots of the business go back to 1964, when John Flemming purchased the three-story house and ran the facility until his son, Peter, bought it from him in 1978. A registered nurse, Peter operated the nursing home along with his wife, Phyllis, a former teacher who oversaw recreation. Today, the reins have been passed (for the most part) to the couple's two children, Laura, 37, and Peter Jr., 34.

Peter Sr. and his wife, both 62, were surprised when their children decided to join the family business. Both had successful careers—Laura was a social worker and Peter Jr. was a nurse in the emergency room at Morristown Memorial Hospital—before coming to Garden Terrace. "It was a well-established family nursing home, a family business that did not need to be fixed or tweaked," says Peter Jr. "The reputation in this area for our business is unbelievable. I think that you'd be silly not to continue that and make that grow."

Most of the residents at Garden Terrace suffer from Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. Unfortunately, Alzheimer's became all too real for the Flemming family when John Flemming developed the illness and became a patient in the facility he once owned. "He was taken care of by people he had hired," Peter Sr. says. John passed away in 2002.

## HOME SWEET HOME

The Flemmings infuse their nursing facility with warmth and dignity. BY MALLORY GELERT

**S**TARK WHITE WALLS, humming fluorescent lights, mechanical beeps and blips—these are the institutional features frequently associated with nursing homes. Garden Terrace in Chatham, however, simply radiates warmth, and most of that energy comes from the family that runs it, the Flemmings.

"People come here and they say it does not feel like a nursing home, it does not feel like a hospital, it does not feel like a rehab—



Today, even the youngest generation of Flemmings is involved in the business. Laura and Peter Jr. each have two children (all are under 7 years old) and sometimes bring them to work as a kind of therapy for the residents. Laura recalls bringing her second daughter, Grace, now 3, to Garden Terrace as an infant.

"Some people who are completely nonverbal and non-responsive, when she would start crying, I would see their eyes light up," Laura says. "They would hear it, they would see it, they would smell it. It was truly amazing."

The Flemmings are staying busy improving their facility, which was built in the 1920s. Current renovations include installation of an elevator for residents and expansion of the two day rooms. The Flemmings also operate an adult day-care center next door called Victorian Garden, which is not a residence but provides daytime activities for members of the community.

With everything they have on their plate, the Flemmings still place their residents' care at the top of their to-do lists.

"Giving them dignity and respect in their compromised state" is essential, Phyllis says. The staff does whatever it can to shake the institutional label applied to some nursing homes. Whether it's taking one resident to a Yankee game or another to the local bowling alley, residents are made to feel like a part of the community while at Garden Terrace.

"This has been a part of my life that I never expected to be so gratifying and so rewarding," says Phyllis. "I'm very proud to see that continue with my children." ■

#### ABOUT THE AWARDS

*The seventeenth annual Family Business of the Year Awards honor the most outstanding family-owned enterprises in New Jersey. Sponsors include PNC Bank, the Rothman Institute of Entrepreneurial Studies at Fairleigh Dickinson University, and New Jersey Monthly. A panel of judges chose winners, finalists, and semi-finalists in two revenue categories based on uniqueness, successful transition of leadership from generation to generation, and their ability to balance business acumen with civic spirit.*