



Brookdale Chestnut Lane is an Assisted Living community for the Deaf.

The Sound of Silence

In the suburban town of Gresham on the outskirts of Portland, Oregon you'll find an Assisted Living community like no other.



This symbolizes community's name Chestnut Lane

If you tour Brookdale Chestnut Lane Gresham, you'll notice that it's remarkably quiet as you walk among residents congregated in the lobby, dining room and activity rooms. Step out on the fourth-floor patio, and you'll see people taking in the scenic view of cedar, fir and pine trees that surround a snow-capped Mount Hood in the distance. But no one there says a word. Wander down the halls of private apartments, and you'll hear no sounds from behind the doors. This community is more hushed than a library, more silent than a monastery.

This World Adapts to the Deaf



The Deaf must often adapt to a hearing world that does not accommodate them. The Deaf have their own language, which like all other languages of the world, is linked to a unique culture. Therefore, when the hearing world fails to make allowances for deaf communication, that failure is felt as a deeper rejection.

Instead of forcing the Deaf to adapt to the world, Brookdale Chestnut Lane has created a world adapted to the Deaf. It is one of only two Assisted Living communities in the U.S. that exclusively

accommodates the needs of deaf residents. Chestnut Lane offers an "immersive" American Sign Language (ASL) environment, where communication is often expressed in ASL. Many of the staff, from caregivers and chefs to the beauty salon stylist and executive director, sign fluently.

In the dining room, if residents want an entrée seasoned a certain way, they sign their preferences to the wait staff. In a physical therapy session, the therapist signs instructions to the patient. When residents visit with a nurse, they describe their symptoms with ASL.



Many of the associates who work there are deaf themselves.



Many of the associates who work there are deaf themselves, making Brookdale Chestnut Lane one of Oregon’s largest employers of the Deaf. Some of those associates are willing to commute for more than an hour because of their desire to work in this one-of-a-kind environment, and residents move from cities all over the country to be part of this unique family.

When you describe people who easily understand you and share your same desires, preferences and values, you might use the common expression, “They speak my language.” At Chestnut Lane, that saying is more than a figure of speech. It is literal.

Designed by the Deaf for the Deaf

This unique community didn’t fall into place by random chance. Brookdale Chestnut Lane was designed by a deaf architect and built in 2003 with features specifically crafted to enhance communication for deaf residents. The spacious open common areas are free from visibility obstructions, allowing people to sign to each other from across the room. This campus was also designed for private communication, with alcoves in the hallways that allow residents to engage in confidential signing conversations.

No Impairments

Brookdale Chestnut Lane has crafted a world where silence is not a deprivation and deafness is not an impairment. In this special place, neighbors join to experience all the other sensations of a life lived to the fullest. They listen with their eyes and speak with their hands. This world that has no sounds, has no bounds.



Julie Heard About Chestnut Lane

No Place to Fit In

While growing up, Julie Novick didn’t feel like she belonged in the hearing world but did her best to adapt while she was “mainstreamed” in the public school system. She learned how to read lips but often found that task frustrating when meeting new people who didn’t face her directly, because they didn’t know she was deaf. Julie explains, “Deafness is a hidden condition. No one knows you are deaf unless they happen to see you signing.”

In those days, Julie also didn’t feel she belonged in the Deaf world, because she wasn’t well-versed in American Sign Language. Although her mother and sister were deaf, and her mother knew ASL, communication within their family took a different direction as they made up their own vocabulary of signs that eventually evolved into a unique sign language known only to them.

Julie faces the additional challenges of Cerebral Palsy, which confines her to a wheelchair. Yet she didn’t feel she belonged in “the CP world” either, because she was deaf.

Struggling Alone

In adulthood, Julie’s life took a downturn after a traumatically difficult divorce. She spent two years in hiding from her ex-husband, living alone in an apartment in Arizona with no one to help her. Her solitary confinement and accumulated stress took a toll on Julie’s health. She had to escape that isolation.

While staying with relatives in Utah, one of her friends there told her about the Deaf community at Chestnut Lane and asked the executive director to send Julie a DVD tour of the community.

Julie was impressed by Chestnut Lane’s attractive four-story building, their hotel-style amenities, and the beautiful view, but she had misgivings. “I was nervous about moving to a strange new city where I knew no one,” she signed.

Her Utah friends and relatives encouraged her to make that bold move. So with a mix of anxiety and bravery, Julie took the leap.

A New Woman

In the seven years that have passed since Julie first wheeled through the entrance of Brookdale Chestnut Lane, she has blossomed.



Designed by the Deaf for the Deaf

Julie is no longer a fearful, stressed, lonely, and sickly woman hidden from the world. She has transformed into a vibrant and active member of her community, competent and popular enough to be elected Resident Council President.

Reflecting on her dramatic changes, Julie signs, "Now, I truly feel safe. I have all the assistance I need to cope and stay healthy. Chestnut Lane has given me a life I never knew before. This is a special place where there is no such thing as a hearing impediment. Here, the Deaf can do anything."

Pollai Heard About Chestnut Lane From Tahiti to Oregon



Do you know how to get from Tahiti to Oregon? Pollai Parsons can help you plot a course. However, before you follow her route, you need to know that her 91-year journey took her on an indirect route around the globe, with stops in European, South American, and African countries, plus China, Japan, India, Thailand, Australia, and Syria.

Although she was officially named Hester at birth (her mother and grandmother's first name), her parents decided to call her by a less formal nickname, "Polly." However, during her childhood at the Berkeley School for the Deaf, Polly didn't like sharing a nickname with the "Polly want a cracker" parrot.



When Polly turned 12, her mother, a high school teacher, moved her family to Tahiti. Polly and her twin

sister traveled on a British ship with their mother across the Pacific to that exotic Polynesian island. For six years her family lived in a shack covered by grass and palm leaves near the beach. There, Polly's mother tutored the girls at home. Her mother also taught Polly how to successfully socialize with those around her.

When she was 15-years-old, Polly took a trip with her family to Bora Bora on a schooner. At dinnertime, a Chinese waiter who took their menu orders misspelled Polly's name on the receipt as "Pollai." She recalls, "I liked the unusual spelling of my name, so I decided to change it to Pollai."

In adulthood, her work as a housewife was followed by a stint as a data card keypunch operator at a bank. But that job was not an ideal fit for her personality.

Instead, Pollai found her perfect calling in a career that tapped into her love of socializing and turned her hearing impairment into an asset. Like her mother, she became a teacher, but chose the specialized field of Adult Education for the Deaf. For the rest of her work life, a strong demand for her rare skills enabled Pollai to find positions wherever she moved across the country, eventually leading her back to the South Pacific to take a teaching job in Hawaii.

The teaching profession gave Pollai the additional benefit of a large block of vacation time each year, which she took full advantage of by visiting countries on every continent of the globe. At home and abroad, her life was rich, filled during school semesters with daily social connections to people just like her, and punctuated each summer by discoveries of foreign lands, which she could relish with all her other senses.

Life in a Box Fast-forward to 2003.

At age 79, Pollai found herself living in a double-wide manufactured home with her daughter in Eugene, Oregon. Her life that was once as wide as the earth had become confined to a wood and fiberglass box in a small town.

The only other person in her world was her daughter. With none of her friends nearby, Pollai had no social life, and nothing to fill her days except watching TV. She felt isolated and lonely while 11 years passed.

Eventually, encroaching health problems made it more difficult for Pollai to carry on. She couldn't put on her stockings without assistance, and she could no longer cook. It became clear to Pollai she was unable to care for herself without some daily help.

However, a mainstream Assisted Living community was out of the question. Pollai signed, "I didn't want to be the only deaf person there."



She has transformed into a vibrant and active member of her community.

A World Tailored for Pollai

A friend of hers previously moved to the Brookdale Chestnut Lane community. During several visits there, Pollai had a glimpse of how different her life could be, surrounded by people just like her in a world tailored for the Deaf. She wanted to escape to this new life.

Now, a year and a half since she moved to her new home at Chestnut Lane, Pollai is constantly socializing at activities and parties in the living room, on the patio, or in the game room where she is a master with cards. "Nine-Square is my game," she explained. "It helps keep you alert and maintain your critical thinking."

Pollai also joins group excursions to museums, art galleries, and coffee houses, plus day trips to destinations like Astoria Beach, Mt. Hood, Mt. St. Helens, Tulip Farms, the Tillamook Cheese Factory, and Multnomah Falls.

Her neighbors and the associates at Chestnut Lane are her family. "No matter what, they are stuck with me here," she signs with a smile.

Pollai's life was once big enough to stretch from Tahiti to the four corners of the Earth, then it shrank to a box of four walls.

Now, her world has opened up once again. From the fourth floor of Brookdale Chestnut Lane Gresham, she can see the clear vista of a wider world. Whenever she goes to Astoria Beach with her neighbors, Pollai can once again dip her feet in Pacific waters that reach far beyond the horizon to lap along the sandy shores of Polynesian isles.

