

# Harsch named one of Edmonton's "Top 40 Under 40"

By Joel van der Veen

EDMONTON—After almost 20 years studying and working in Alberta, Dawn Harsch still holds dear the things she learned growing up in Davidson, especially a strong sense of family, community and respect.

"In a small town, the whole community becomes your family," said Harsch, the daughter of Wayne and Connie Townsend. "Growing up in Davidson, we naturally learned to take care of one another."

Those life lessons—including the importance of valuing, respecting and caring for the elderly—have been a clear inspiration in her career as a health care provider.

Harsch's new project is ExquisiCare, a business based on a new model and concept for seniors housing. The company's first home, a 10-bedroom, 10-bathroom facility in southwest Edmonton, will open this March, with expert care provided by a full-time nurse and a staff of health care aides.

The company is devoted to providing seniors with purposeful living, allowing them to continue pursuing their passions and enjoy a high quality of life. Residents will have a full range of opportunities and activities to choose from, and they'll receive quality personal care that can expand to meet their needs, should they change.

In their November issue, Edmonton's *Avenue* magazine named Harsch as one of the city's "Top 40 Under 40"; she was chosen as one of "the young talented people in Edmonton who are



Dawn Harsch.

planting roots here and impacting their communities."

Her selection places her among other noted figures across several fields, including science, art, law, medicine, business and technology. Harsch said she was honoured by the magazine's recognition, and at the same time, pleased to know that others see the value of her contributions.

She was nominated by her colleagues earlier this year; the magazine notified her in July that she'd been selected from a field of around 500 nominees. After an application process, she made the cut and went in for an interview and photo shoot.

Though she'd known about the award in advance, Harsch wasn't allowed to reveal it to others until the magazine's release party on Oct. 26.

"I had to keep it a secret until then," she noted.

Harsch graduated from Davidson High School in 1991. The following year, she moved to Edmonton, earning both her nursing degree and her MBA at the University of Alberta. She joined the city's Capital Health region in 2001 as a patient care manager.

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## Seniors need "the finest level of care"

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In 2004, she was promoted to director, a position she held for five years. During that time she worked to coordinate and provide services for patients, including rural residents; these initiatives included the conversion of a large passenger bus into a mobile dialysis unit, as well as the construction or renovation of nine dialysis units in central and northern Alberta.

Later, when she was consulted by health care providers in Nova Scotia and the Northwest Territories, who sought advice on delivering dialysis services, she recommended they follow Alberta's lead, alleviating rural patients from having to drive to cities for assistance.

Harsch said the concept for ExquisiCare is based on the model she sees in rural communities, in which there is often greater respect for the elderly, along with a higher degree of personal care.

This model, she said, needs to become more commonplace in the cities, and that's what ExquisiCare is striving to achieve.

While this service model

will be more expensive, Harsch told *Avenue* magazine, savings will be realized in the form of fewer hospital trips and reduced demand.

"The way we (as society) care for seniors is not good enough," Harsch was quoted. "These are people who have fought in wars, have started families, have been community leaders... and in the end, they get a four-by-eight room in a run-down home?"

Part of the criteria for the "Top 40 Under 40" was a demonstration of community involvement. Harsch's contributions include volunteering on a playground redevelopment committee, coaching kids' sports teams, and serving on the Rotary Club. She and her husband, Cory, have three children: Kyrie, aged 14, and twins, Mara and Cale, aged four.

Harsch said her love for the elderly was instilled at a young age; she recalls dancing with her grandpa, the late Lorne Frier, her feet perched atop his.

"I can still remember the tune he used to hum," she said, adding that she believes seniors need to be treated with respect and dignity for the contributions they have made to our communities.

"The elderly deserve only the finest level of care and attention that we can provide, at a time when they now need our help."

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