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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

## **Life's lessons learned—and shared**

**WYSE program introduces youth to wisdom of the aged**

***Intergenerational program takes top state award from LeadingAge Texas***

AUSTIN, TEXAS--A program that pairs high school students with seniors is proving that friendships can reach across many decades and change lives. The WYSE initiative—*Wisdom for Youth from Senior Expertise*—celebrated the completion of its inaugural season by winning the 2013 Innovative Program of the Year from [LeadingAge Texas](#), an association of not-for-profit senior living communities.

The WYSE program is a partnership between the Methodist Retirement Communities and high schools located near MRC communities. The ten-week curriculum structures conversations around life lessons so that each senior mentor can pass along wisdom to his or her protégé. The WYSE program was launched last fall as a pilot outreach program to help build bridges between the senior population and young people. Students in the participating high schools go through a selective application process, an orientation program, and must commit to fulfilling volunteer hours, for which

they receive 12 to 15 hours of community service to use toward college applications and high school requirements.

"The goal of this program is to fully engage the community with those who reside in retirement communities," said Ron Jennette, President and CEO for Methodist Retirement Communities. "WYSE develops future leaders of the community, teaches intergenerational respect for one another, and keeps our seniors feeling important and connected to the community. As an added plus, the participants develop fast friendships that last beyond the 10-week program."

Teachers who serve as WYSE coordinators at the local high schools have been pleasantly surprised by the reaction among participating students. "I love how the WYSE program has been received by my students," said Jennifer Wellman, a teacher at Rudder High School in Bryan. "The students that are taking part are having a great time learning from their senior buddies and are learning a lot. Several students repeated the experience a second semester and the buzz among other students is catching."

Students are carefully matched with their mentors based on career interests and other lifestyle factors. The program includes academic standards within its design. Students and senior mentors each attend an orientation session to learn about each other (the Greatest Generation and the Millennial Generation). Weekly each student is provided a set of questions to ask, including questions designed to glean information about the senior mentor's childhood, challenges faced, and even regrets. Lessons include financial literacy, values, healthy lifestyles, and current events. Students are required to make a video, write a short biography, and develop a proverb to live by with

their mentor. The latter is etched on a stone to make a walkway through the MRC campus.

“We see many of our students that do not have grandparents from which to draw a long term perspective,” said Anne S. Davis, Vice President of Philanthropy for MRC. “The idea is to engage, empower and enlighten the students; and to awaken in them the realization you only get one shot at this thing called 'life.'”

The program has proven to be a source of social significance to the seniors. “Many residents in retirement communities have experienced great success in life. The Crestview (Bryan) population alone includes teachers, professional athletes, judges, NASA engineers, and CEOs of companies,” said Davis. “Yet when they retire, these successful people often become disengaged and lonely. The WYSE program has had a tremendous positive affect on the senior mentors, all of whom look forward to visits from their new youthful friends. They have a renewed sense of value and self-worth.”

WYSE concludes at the end of each semester with a reception for participants, family members and friends. “WYSE participants love to introduce their families to each other and even more magic happens. Families tend to adopt one another!” As one participant exclaimed, “I think of you as my granddaughter.” Another senior mentor told his protégé that meeting him has given him faith in the next generation.

The WYSE program was made possible through an initial sponsorship from Greystone Communities, a company specializing in senior care options. “As a founding partner of the WYSE program, Greystone continues to demonstrate its commitment to providing life-enriching programs for our elderly population,” said Mark Andrews, President and COO, [Greystone Communities](#), Inc.

The MRC WYSE program will be available to the public in July of this year. The WYSE curriculum, orientation programs, application forms, certificates, final reception materials and much more will all be available on-line for a small fee. For more information contact the MRC Foundation at 281-210-0133 or [mrcfoundation@mrcaff.org](mailto:mrcfoundation@mrcaff.org).

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LeadingAge Texas is committed to assisting its members in providing the highest quality of services possible to the residents they serve. To accomplish its purpose, the Association provides up-to date information, education, representation, group services, and networking as well as prompt, efficient service to the professional staff of its member communities. The Association is comprised of more than 275 members, including approximately 250 of Texas' finest retirement housing communities, assisted living facilities, continuing care retirement communities, and nursing homes. Over 30,000 older persons reside in LeadingAge Texas-member communities.

Greystone Communities Inc. has advised more than 500 organizations in strategic planning, project planning, business improvement, repositioning, development, marketing and management of continuing care retirement communities (CCRCs).