



## Memories Matter at The Alexander Properties

*A Note From Mitch Leichter, Executive Director/Partner*

March offers a meaningful opportunity to highlight and showcase our memory supportive programs. These life-enriching programs help our residents stay engaged and connected.

When I began my career in senior care in 1996 as a Recreation Therapist, I developed a deeply rooted philosophy about providing care with dignity and respect to our residents, families, and staff.



This philosophy led to the [Sensory Integration Program](#), which was recognized by the California Assisted Living Association (CALA) several years ago. Sensory awareness weaves aromatherapy and a holistic environment (the Zen gardens, wind chimes, music, and aroma diffusers) throughout The Alexander communities. We are reinforcing the belief that environment and thoughtful, engaging experiences make a difference in daily life.

Investing in our team's education and well-being is also part of The Alexander Properties philosophy. By supporting our staff, we build a consistent, committed care team that benefits both residents and their families.



But the true success of our culture is watching a resident's face light up in response to a familiar scent, a piece of music, or a texture that stirs something deep within their memory.

These are the true moments that affirm what we have always believed. Compassion and thoughtful care have the power to connect with people experiencing memory loss. I am deeply grateful to lead a team that shares this philosophy so wholeheartedly.

Our shared purpose of creating an environment where residents feel valued and respected sets us apart. Our communities are built on connection and caring. It's a special place to call home.

Our newsletter features stories, events, and photos from life at The Alexander Properties. If you're a caregiver, professional, or community member, and would like to learn more about Parkinson's. Visit our booth at the Santa Barbara Parkinson's Association 2026 Symposium on Saturday, April 11. Villa Alamar Memory Care and Alexander Gardens Assisted Living will be there with resources, ideas, and support. Please stop by and say hello.

## Intergenerational Activities at Villa Alamar Memory Care



The University of California, Santa Barbara students recently spent time with our residents, at Villa Alamar sharing activities that improved their mood and stimulated their memories.

Our Intergenerational programs build bridges between generations, enriching lives and strengthening the sense of community for both seniors and students alike. These shared moments remind us how powerful a simple human connection can be.



## Enriching Activities at Alexander Gardens Assisted Living



We believe meaningful days are built around activities that stimulate the mind, encourage connection, and bring a sense of purpose to each resident's routine.



## The Alexander Properties March Events & Happenings



### Alexander Gardens Resident Highlight: Norma Merritt Childhood Memories That Matter Most



Sandra Merritt, daughter of Norma Merritt, recently shared childhood memories of her mom and the loving home she created for her family.

In 1943 Norma was born in Corry, PA, a small rural town in the Midwest. She married her high school sweetheart, Norman LaJean Merritt, in 1955. Imagine the confusion over their names! Norma Jean married Norman LaJean! They were married for 64 years and together they have 4 children, 11 grandchildren, and 19 great-grandchildren.

Norm joined the Air Force shortly after they were married. As an Air Force family, they lived in several states and overseas. Sandra remembers that moving could sometimes be challenging, but those years were exciting and full of adventure. Her mom had a special gift for making every place they lived feel like home.

Holidays and birthdays were especially memorable, filled with balloons, cookies, games, and homemade meals that brought everyone together. Sandra shared one of her favorite childhood memories from the 1970s: "We lived on a cul-de-sac, and my dad and the neighbors decided to throw a block party. The dads lined up the kids' Big Wheels in the street and raced them from one end of the cul-de-sac to the other. They were laughing the whole time as they tried to pedal those tiny tricycles," Sandra recalls.

As grandparents, the adventures continued. Each summer, they invited a few of the grandchildren to spend a month with them, creating special memories filled with laughter, stories, and time together.

Sandra describes her mom as creative, talented, and deeply caring. She is known for her crafts, her wonderful cooking, and for sewing our clothes until we reached the age when we said no more.



Above all, Sandra says her mother is brave. Throughout her life, she has faced challenges with determination and quiet strength.

Though she may appear reserved at times, Sandra says her mom has a sweet and gentle spirit. Norma's life is a beautiful reminder of the power of family, creativity, and the simple joy of bringing people together. Family has always been at the heart of Norma Merritt's life and it remains her greatest joy.

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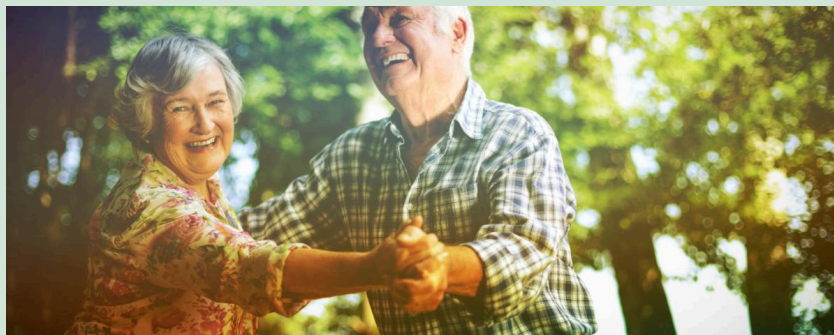
## When Memory Changes: Understanding Challenging Behaviors in Dementia



We are proud to share the article [\*“Difficult Behaviors in Dementia: How to Keep Patients Safe and Caregivers Sane, Part 1,”\*](#) written by Luciana Mitzkun, memory care expert, Community Resource Director at Villa Alamar Memory Care, and a licensed RCFE Administrator. Luciana shares her 30 years of experience supporting families and residents affected by dementia, including Alzheimer's disease.

Her books on memory care, [\*Ahead of Dementia\*](#), & [\*Ahead of Memory Loss\*](#), are popular resources bringing valuable information and strategies to residents and caregivers affected with memory-related conditions. Her work is also available in Spanish, [\*Un Paso Adelante de la Demencia\*](#), on her [\*YouTube Channel\*](#), and on [\*Substack\*](#).

## Identifying Difficult Behaviors



At times, people living with Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia act differently than what would be considered their normal behavior. Whether it be expressions of frustration and stubbornness in the beginning stages of the disease, or resistance to care and agitation in later stages, some changes in behavior should be expected.

Dementia often causes patients to experience confusion in relation to place and time, what to do next, and what others

Some of these behaviors are perplexing, but harmless. Caregivers may even find it amusing when their loved ones start tearing page after page out of magazines and folding them multiple times into increasingly smaller pieces, until they can no longer be folded; some patients move items around the house, continuously rearranging and moving them again; some patients enjoy bursting the

expect of them in social situations. Confusion leads to an increase in feelings of fear and anxiety, which in turn causes a patient to exhibit difficult behaviors. Caregivers are often puzzled and bewildered by these troublesome behaviors.

bubbles on packing materials, or watching the same TV show over and over again.

[Read More](#)

### Photo Shoot with Images by Valerie at The Alexander Estate

The Alexander Estate gardens had the pleasure of serving as the backdrop for the **Images by Valerie's** annual Pooch Playoffs photo shoot.

Our historic gardens provided a timeless backdrop filled with beauty and charm, making it extra special for the pups. What makes this event especially meaningful is Valerie's continued commitment to giving back. A portion of the proceeds benefits **Care4Paws**, over the last 5 years, they have raised over \$8,100 for Care4Paws to support local pets in need.



### About Pooch Playoffs

### The Alexander Estate Event Venue



**Reserve a space** for your next family luncheon or small business workshops, client lunches, and intimate events.

***For booking information, Please contact Diane:***

[diane@alexandergardensal.com](mailto:diane@alexandergardensal.com)  
or call (805) 682-9644

**The Alexander Estate**

## Santa Barbara Up Coming Events



### **Parkinson Association of Santa Barbara 2026 Symposium**

Saturday, Apr 11, 2026 at 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM PDT

Elk's Lodge, 150 North Kellogg Avenue, Goleta, CA, 93111, United States

If you're a caregiver, professional, or community member, and would like to learn more about Parkinson's. Villa Alamar Memory Care and Alexander Gardens Assisted Living will be at the Santa Barbara Parkinson Association 2026 Symposium on Saturday, April 11, 2026, from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM.

**Please stop by our booth and say hello. We'll be there with resources, ideas, and support.**

**Learn More**

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Alexander Properties*

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