

Ponte and daughters depart Foothill Village without explanation

Dana Nichols Jan 16, 2015



Debbie Ponte
Courtesy photo

Debbie Ponte, the long-time executive director of the Foothill Village residential care facility in Angels Camp, has been relieved of her duties there, according to a letter sent to Foothill Village residents.

Ponte is also the elected Calaveras County supervisor representing the southwest portion of Calaveras County, including Angels Camp.

The Jan. 8 letter announcing Ponte's abrupt departure was signed by Rob Allen, regional director of operations for Integral Senior Living, a Carlsbad-based company that operates 56 senior care facilities in 11 states.

The letter said that Michelle Ponte, Debbie Ponte's daughter, was also leaving her job as lead medical technician for Foothill Village.



Debbie Ponte, reached by phone, said that, in fact, both of her daughters had worked at Foothill Village and had departed along with her.

"We just had a mutual understanding of my departure," Ponte said of her relationship with Integral Senior Living officials. "We both agreed not to say much of anything. It is a very private matter. I am OK with it. And it has given me some opportunities to move forward."

Ponte had been with Foothill Village since its construction in 2000. She has also, during those years, been active in public service, serving on the Angels Camp City Council before being elected to be a Calaveras County supervisor in 2012. This week, she completed a year-long stint as chairwoman of the Board of Supervisors.

A search of public records failed to find any recent incidents that might explain Ponte's departure. The California Department of Social Services, which regulates senior care homes, last issued citations against Foothill Village in September 2013.

Of the four citations issued then during an unannounced inspection, two were the "Type A" category considered most serious. The state report says the inspector issued one citation because toxic cleaning supplies were present in the rooms of residents. The other was for medications that were in residents' rooms rather than stored in a locked place as required by state law.

In both cases, Foothill Village staffers were required to correct the violations that same day. Ponte's signature was on the form acknowledging the citations.

Michael Weston, a spokesman for the Department of Social Services, said the number of inspections and citations for Foothill Village was not "unusual."

In October 2012, Foothill Village settled a wrongful-death lawsuit by making a payment. The details of the settlement, including the amount paid, were sealed and are not a public record.

The suit was filed by Victoria Stone. Her father, Palmer Van Dyke, died on Sept. 28, 2009 after having been a resident of Foothill Village. The suit alleged that Foothill Village staff delayed treatment for Van Dyke's pneumonia and that resulted in his death later in a hospital.

Among the allegations in the suit was that Ponte had told staff not to dial 911 and call an ambulance without first getting her clearance. Because of the settlement, however, there was never a trial that might have determined the truth of the allegations.

Weston confirmed that state law does not allow care facility staff to postpone a 911 call in order to get clearance from a manager. Businesses seeking to control costs might benefit from limiting 911 calls because it could reduce the bills they might have to pay for ambulance service.

The letter from Allen of **Integral Senior Living** thanked Ponte for her "many years of service to the staff and residents of Foothill Village."

Allen's letter also said, "Please know that our first priority has and will continue to be the care and safety of you, our residents."

Allen had not responded by Wednesday to messages delivered Monday by phone and email asking for comment.

Ponte declined to shed more light on the matter.

"There will be lots of rumors. I understand that. It is a small community," Ponte said. "It is very private and I wish not to share it with the community at large."

She also said that her departure from Foothill Village does not mean she is retiring.

"My plate is always full and I've been involved in the senior industry for many years and plan to continue to do so," she said.

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