

Future CCRC-ers

Baby boomers size up retirement communities

In life's later decades, will baby boomers follow in their parents' footsteps — for once? Continuing care retirement communities are hoping, and even expecting, that they will.

In a recent national survey, family members who already had relatives (typically parents) living in continuing care retirement communities were asked where they hoped to live later in life, how they expected to be cared for, and what lifestyle they anticipated.

According to the survey, 77 percent of the primarily baby boom-generation respondents said they were likely to consider a CCRC for themselves. In fact, they felt their generation was even more likely to move into an age-qualified or CCRC community than were their parents, and they hoped to do so earlier.

A CCRC is an age-restricted, amenity-rich community where residents live independently, with meals, services, activities and transportation available. Residents may transition through higher levels of care without ever having to move.

"The boomers don't want to be a burden to their own children," says Linda Hollinger-Smith, vice president of Mather LifeWays Institute on Aging, which co-sponsored the study with Ziegler and Brecht Associates Inc. "Their parents waited too long to move into retirement living, and they want to be more proactive. They realize it's not a place where you give things up; it's a place to experience new things."

It will be easier for boomers to make the move, "because they will not have the legacy of a home they have been in for 30-50 years, nor will they have worked one place their entire career," she says.

What boomers want

The survey showed boomers are interested in home and personal technology, fitness, outdoor living space, onsite conveniences and dining choices.

This is exactly what CCRCs are



Top: The Fairfield Room at The Mather offers a fireplace and a grand piano creating a relaxing space. Above: Residents enjoy the landscaped gardens at The Mather, conducive to walks and enjoying the outdoors. The two-acre gardens consist of raised beds and walking paths.

building now to satisfy an older demographic, says Mike Flynn, CEO of Smith Crossing in Orland Park. So it makes sense the baby boomers will want that and more. "One thing we know about the boomers, they want choice," he says.

This fall Smith Crossing will open a \$37-million expansion that includes 76 new independent living apartments with in-unit laundries, walk-in closets, balconies and patios, and underground parking. New common areas in-

clude a movie theater, spa, pub, art studio, gallery, meeting space, courtyards and formal gardens. It's already 90 percent sold, he says.

Smith Village, its sister community in Beverly, spent almost twice as much in 2007 renovating and expanding.

Betsie Hale of Evergreen Park says Smith Village was the perfect place for her mother-in-law who lived there a number of years. At 65, Hale works part time as a Smith Village receptionist. She says she wouldn't mind living



The new Mather in downtown Evanston is impressive, from the quality of the apartments to the social activities and the spa-like amenities. The CCRC just opened its second building.

there herself when the time comes. She says book discussion groups, pinocle card clubs and lunchtime field trips appeal to her, in addition to knowing she would not have to move again. Hale says her husband isn't ready to discuss moving, but she sees it differently. "Quite a few people wait too long, and they don't have a chance to experience independent living and all it has to offer," she says.

Flynn says he doesn't expect leading-edge boomers like Hale to show up at CCRCs for at least another 13-15 years, but "we want to build flexible space that we can convert for changing needs."

Amenities and more

The Mather, in Evanston, just opened its second building, which is connected to its 10-story flagship location via an underground walkway/gallery. Eighty percent of total units are sold. The new building's amenities sound like those of a country club: restaurants, a 10,000-square-foot fitness center, pool and day spa, 22-seat movie theater, computerized wine bar, and two acres of gardens with raised beds and paths.

Since a boomer-age adult child is typically a key decision maker in finding a place for mom and dad, they are often the first one to walk through the doors of a CCRC to check it out. Sometimes they want to stay.

George Costakis of Lake Forest jokes that he was ready to move into The Mather when his mother, Elaine Costakis, did two years ago at age 83. "When we were picking out her cabinets and making all the decisions for the unit, I said, 'Can I move in?' and they said, 'Oh, no, you have to be at least 62.' and I said, 'You're kidding, because I'd like to move in right now.'"

Everything from the quality of the apartment to the social activities to the spa-like amenities to the downtown Evanston location impressed him. Now that his mother has lived there awhile, he sees the value. "My main concern was that she be taken care of, and it's a very caring environment," he says. "If you need anything, they're right there."

Wade Keats, president of Keats Manufacturing in Wheeling, could potentially be a third-generation CCRC-er. His grandmother lived at The Georgian (part of Mather LifeWays) and later at The Mather. His father and uncle live there now. "If I have the money, I would probably consider it," says Keats.

At 56, Keats cannot predict his own retirement date, but says The Mather was a great move for his father, uncle and grandmother — and bought peace of mind for him. "I like the progressive care. I felt comfortable with that," he says. "I consider it the Ritz-Carlton of assisted living." ■