

Healthy living is the best medicine

By Jane Adler

Special to the Tribune

The concept of wellness is taking center stage at a growing number of retirement communities and buildings, according to a recent survey by Evanston-based Mather LifeWays Institute on Aging. About 43 percent of properties surveyed had written wellness objectives, and another 40 percent expect to have them in the next 12 months.

"Many buildings are starting a culture of wellness," said Perry Edelman, survey author and Mather's director of outcomes research. "Communities are helping residents take ownership of their health."

Increasingly, health and home are being packaged together, and not just for seniors. New condominiums often have a fitness center. The Arizona spa Canyon Ranch plans a high-rise off Michigan Avenue with a spa and wellness services.

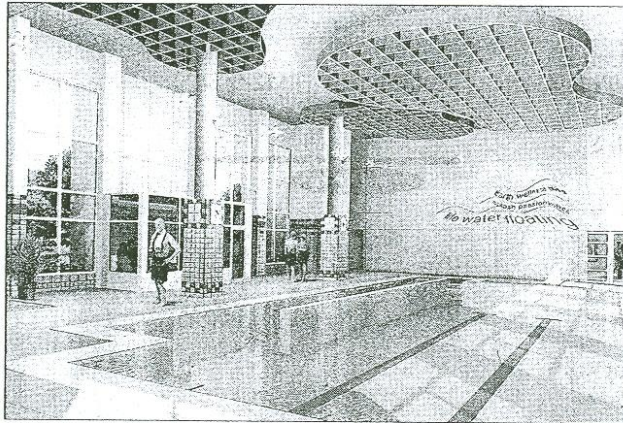
For seniors, building directors are trying to figure out ways to keep residents strong and engaged, instead of focusing just on health problems. Of course, many senior buildings have exercise and activity programs, and that's a start.

But a concept called the whole person approach has emerged in the last several years as the gold standard. This approach says that wellness exists in six dimensions: physical, social, emotional, spiritual, intellectual and vocational.

Mather LifeWays, which operates several local campuses for seniors, embraced the whole person wellness approach about three years ago, Edelman said. "We adopted wellness in a systematic approach across everything we do."

The survey came about because Mather wanted to see whether other buildings were using wellness standards. (The survey was co-sponsored by the architectural firm of Dorsky Hodgson Parrish Yue of Cleveland and Milwaukee-based Ziegler Capital Markets Group.)

The survey found that buildings (continuing care properties) offered the most activities on the social and physical fronts. The fewest were available in the emotional and vocational areas, though building



A shallow swimming pool designed for water aerobics, shown in rendering, is planned for Friendship Village in Schaumburg.

managers said they expected to beef up those programs in the next two years. "A lot of communities are moving toward this," Edelman said.

Locally, a number of retirement campuses are adding wellness-type features. At Friendship Village in Schaumburg, the first floor of a new apartment building under construction will include spaces to encourage wellness. There will be a fitness center and spa. An aquatic center will have a swimming pool designed for older adults, with a comfortable water temperature and a shallow depth for water aerobics.

Restaurants and gathering areas, one with a pool table, will aid socializing.

But the programs at Friendship Village go well beyond physical exercise and social networking, said David Loop, president and chief executive. "We include mental fitness and lifelong learning," he noted. Lecturers and classes are being brought in from Roosevelt University and Harper College. Some will be held at the new Friendship Center, part of the \$73 million campus redevelopment that will include community space and a large assembly hall for cultural performances.

Because Friendship Village has adopted the whole person wellness approach, offerings include a spiritual dimension. Not affiliated with a church, the property has three ministers on staff.

Mather LifeWays, which is putting up two new retirement

managers surveyed said they had a positive effect on residents and their families. "They believe this stuff works," said Edelman. He hopes to survey residents next.

What's ahead? Edelman said current residents still need encouragement to participate in wellness activities. These elders are not used to taking such an active approach. But the swelling number of aging Baby Boomers will present a new challenge, Edelman added. This group is much more proactive, and they expect buildings to help them facilitate their personal wellness. Look for more wellness programs, activities and amenities to encourage healthy aging.

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