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# Primetime

A monthly look at local lifestyle news for those over 50

## Easy street

Low-maintenance homes appeal to empty nesters

**A** big reason why older people move to a retirement community is to let someone else handle the chores.

Kay Rago owned a big house on the Northwest Side of Chicago, but the upkeep became a lot to handle. She hired services to help with the landscaping and household jobs, but she still had to manage everything. "I wasn't as comfortable in my house anymore," says Rago.

With the encouragement of her children, Rago recently sold her house and moved to Mather Place in Wilmette. She has a two-bedroom apartment there. Housekeepers clean her apartment every week. They change her linens too.

Rago doesn't have to cook for herself. She fixes her own breakfast and lunch in her apartment, but she eats dinner in the building's dining room, which offers three meals a day. A staff member is always available to help. "If I need anything done in the apartment, like hanging a picture, someone comes to help right away," says Rago. "I have more time for myself."

Most retirement communities provide home maintenance services, but the level of service varies, depending on the community. Active adult communities generally provide landscaping and snow removal services. Age-restricted rental buildings offer the kinds of services that any landlord would typically provide. Continuing care communities generally offer a complete suite of services, from pro-

who lives  here

*This is part of a continuing series, "Who Lives Here," that takes a look at different senior housing options. This month, we focus on maintenance-free communities. Next month we will feature active adult communities.*

viding all the outdoor property upkeep to weekly cleaning of the individual apartments.

Many older people like the idea of a low- or no-maintenance home. It's easy to travel, or leave for the winter, when someone else watches over the property and takes care of the chores.

The Maples at the Sonatas in Woodstock offers maintenance-free ranch homes. The project is an Epcor Community, a national franchise home builder that specializes in maintenance-free homes. The Maples is not age restricted, but appeals to empty nesters who prefer a home without a lot of upkeep. Home prices start at about \$175,000. About a third of the homes are already occupied.

Maintenance services provided at the Sonatas include lawn care, bush trimming and fertilization. Snow removal is provided too. A service shovels the sidewalks and plows the driveways.

The Maples also offers exterior main-

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tenance of the homes, a service not usually provided by home builders. The driveways are regularly seal coated too. Home roof repair is included as part of the community's services. Even the windows on the homes are washed twice a year.

"This is really low-maintenance living," says Carol Lyons, new sales consultant at the Sonatas, a project by Wilcox Development, the local Epcon home builder.

### **Lock and leave**

Homeowner Bill Nicholson travels half the time for business. He and his wife spend the winter in Florida. So the couple was happy to find a house they liked at the Regency at the Woods of South Barrington, an age-restricted community with single-family homes. "Our community affords us the ability to come and go with complete confidence because our house is essentially maintenance free," says Bill.

Included in the monthly homeowner's fees are road repair and maintenance, landscaping, trash removal, and upkeep of the community bike and walking trail. The yards and common areas are regularly mowed. Lawns and plants are fertilized. The community also takes care of snow removal from the streets, driveways, sidewalks and front porches. Homeowners even get salt shakers for stubborn ice patches on their property.

The homes at the Regency are also designed for low maintenance, according to Cheryl Molfese, sales manager at the Regency, a project of Toll Brothers. The homes are made of stucco, brick, and siding. The decks are made of a low-maintenance material. Homeowners sometimes team up to purchase services such as window washing in order to keep costs in check.

Maintenance at active adult communities is paid for by the homeowners through a monthly association fee. The monthly fee at the Regency is \$358 a month.

Monthly fees at other local active adult communities typically range from about \$175 to about \$230. Townhomes usually have higher monthly association fees than single-family homes. Townhome fees cover exterior maintenance and roof repair. Residents of single-family homes in an age-restricted community are usually responsible for exterior home repairs.

At the local active adult Del Webb communities, the monthly fee includes landscaping, snow removal and seal coating of the home driveways. Common areas are maintained as well. The properties also have an on-site property manager and a staffed gate house. New home sales are under way at the four local Del Webb Communities: Edgewater in Elgin, Shorewood Glen in Shorewood, Grand Dominion in Mundelein, and Sun

City Huntley.

The monthly fees at active adult communities also include use of all the recreational facilities. The Del Webb communities have lots of common amenities, such as a pool, clubhouse, tennis courts and spa.

At the local active adult Carillon communities, residents have access to a community clubhouse, fitness center, swimming pool, tennis courts, and outdoor walking trails. New home sales are under way at Carillon Club in Naperville, Carillon at Cambridge Lakes in Pingree Grove, and Carillon at Stonegate in Aurora. Carillon Lakes at Pingree Grove will include a three-hole golf course with multiple tee locations when it opens in 2013.

Potential homeowners should ask whether the community has maintenance reserves. Most communities set aside some of the monthly homeowner's fees in case a big repair at the property is needed. ■