

Senior Living Provider Turns Renovation into Programming Opportunity

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As Mather LifeWays prepares for the \$6.5 million renovation and \$17 million expansion of its senior rental community Mather Place of Wilmette Illinois, executives say the property's current residents are playing an active role in the property's development plans, to the benefit of both parties.

The renovation, slated to begin in late spring, and expansion, slated for early 2015, will not affect the day-to-day services and amenities offered to residents, says David Kane, vice president of senior living for the Evanston, Illinois-based provider, adding that resident feedback has been incorporated into upcoming plans.

Mather Lifeways is taking some cues from its recent renovation of its The Mather CCRC, originally built in 1941.

"We've found that since we did The Mather [in Evanston] in phases, it's become an interesting activity for residents to watch how [the property] is expanding," Kane says, pointing to the past redevelopment of its sister community.

Mather Place of Wilmette is one of Mather LifeWays' three senior living campuses.

To communicate the senior living provider's plans to residents, management leaders hosted a series of resident meetings to explain the renovation and expansion. Some residents even voiced their support to Village of Wilmette trustees by writing letters and attending village board meetings related to the development project, Kane says.

The renovation includes an expanded fitness center and wellness suite; a cinema; updated creative arts studio and sundries shop; expanded multi-purpose spaces, library, and computer center; and enhanced salon and day spa.

The expansion will create an additional 39 apartment homes, bringing the total number of apartments to 174, and will also include an indoor swimming pool, an additional dining area, an all-season gazebo in a new courtyard and an additional walking path around the community. The addition of a glass-enclosed space linking two corridors will also encourage exercise and bring more natural light into the facility, Kane says.

When The Mather underwent construction a few years ago, a camera was secured to the top of a construction crane so that residents could view the changes from a unique angle, he says. At the Wilmette property, hard-hat tours for residents are in the works.

"We're making it integral to the programming of the community and keeping it exciting," says Kane.

Occupancy at the Wilmette property is at 90%, according to Kane, who adds that Mather LifeWays experienced a growing demand for housing in that community last year. Mather Place will pre-sell the development of the additional apartments, he says, pointing to The Mather in Evanston as an example for the high demand for senior housing in the area.

"At The Mather in Evanston 100% [of the units] are sold and 98% are occupied," Kane says, adding that empty units belong to seniors who are selling their home and have not yet moved in. "Because of the interest we fully expect in a short period of time in Wilmette that we will have a significant amount of those [new units] pre-sold. We look to be stabilized at 96% [occupancy] in a relatively short period of time."

Kane notes that while the Evanston and Wilmette properties are both on the north shore of Chicago's suburbs, they attract different clients and are marketed differently. The Mather is a

continuing care retirement community (CCRC), while Mather Place of Wilmette is a rental-based senior living community.

Written by [Cassandra Dowell](#) ^[1]

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