

Friday, December 12, 2008

Life care communities



David and Anne Floyd lived in the same East Aurora house more than 43 years before moving to their new apartment at Fox Run at Orchard Park in March. Charles and Bernice Fogel lived in their North Buffalo home 58 years before moving to Williamsville's Canterbury Woods in July.

Both facilities are considered continuing care retirement communities, and marketing them can be challenging. The concept is relatively new in New York, and Fox Run and Canterbury Woods are two of nine statewide.

Each offers services as an independent living retirement community, an assisted living community and a skilled nursing care facility.

And when the time comes to leave independent living for additional onsite care, there's no fee increase.

"Our biggest competitor is people's own homes. People don't want to leave their houses," said Canterbury Woods Marketing Director Shari Franco.

Canterbury Woods looks North; Fox Run South

Fox Run opened last November. Its marketing director, Cathy Aquino, typically canvasses the Southtowns for leads. She seeks those living south of the city or want to because their families do. Likewise, Franco said Canterbury Woods, opened in 1999, looks to draw from up to 10 miles of its Williamsville facility.

When a prospect visits, Franco and Aquino talk lawn care, snow removal, trash pickup, and social clubs.

Use of indoor pools, exercise rooms, billiard tables, upscale dining rooms and shuttles to shopping or performances such as the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra are also discussed.

But closing a deal could take a year. After visiting, often multiple times, residents usually share details with children, financial planners or others before committing.

“A life care community guarantees you’ll be taken care of the rest of your life,” Aquino said.

“You’re not buying real estate, you’re buying a contract with lifetime use of an apartment and additional services, if necessary,” said Susan Dickson, vice president of marketing services for New Jersey-based New Life Management and Development Inc., who works with Fox Run.

Decision to make move seen as gift to children

This appealed to the Floyds. David, 76, is a retired lawyer. He calls the move to Fox Run a gift to his five children. As important as making the move was the fact they made the decision themselves. This means their children won’t wrangle with long-term care or how to pay for it.

They agreed the move from their four-bedroom house to a 1,136-square foot apartment wasn’t as much of a change as one might think.

They sold the house to one of their daughters. Anne, 76 and a retired nurse said, “We only used a few rooms anyway.”

“It’s nice not having to go up and down stairs to use the washer and dryer,” her husband added.

The Floyd’s new place is a mix of old and new. Amid the furniture that once was Mrs. Floyd’s mother’s are new custom-built bookcases and a desk made for his office.

The Canterbury Woods apartment Aurea and Robert Leonard share is laid out similarly to the Floyds’. A resident since 2000, she credits the community there for helping her grieve her husband’s death in 2001.

Rather than having neighbors or family gone all day, she was constantly surrounded. Neighbors are across the hall, not across the street.

“I felt so supported and never felt alone,” said Mrs. Leonard, 86, a former financial aid adviser at Buffalo State College. Her husband is 85 and a retired physician. He and his wife moved there in 2003. She passed the following year.

This must be what it’s like living on a cruise ship

Mrs. Fogel, 84, told one of her three sons earlier this year she and Charles, 95, were considering Canterbury Woods. The son promised to discuss it during an upcoming visit.

Too late. Charles, 95, a retired University at Buffalo professor said, laughing, “We already had put a deposit on it.”

The six interviewed for this article all enjoyed successful careers and seem happy.

Golden years? The way they go on about staff and service makes it more like platinum years. All seem the type to gather facts to make decisions rather than jumping to conclusions. All graciously opened doors to their new homes and, through their rich storytelling, opened windows into their lives.

These are the kind of people – smart, independent, empowered – Aquino and Franco ultimately try to target.

Referring to the features and size of Canterbury Woods, Bernice Fogel said, “it’s like being on a cruise ship.” Make that the Love Boat. The Leonards met there, and were living there, when their spouses passed. Aurea and Robert married in 2004.

Seated on a sofa near the main entrance, Aurea tells how there’s so much to do. “You can even fall in love,” her voice lilting while playfully snuggling her husband and folding his hand into hers.

Bernice sees this and stretches her right hand over the side of her chair and down the side of Charles’. She feels for his hand.

Once she finds it, she says, “We’re still holding hands, too ... We’ve been married 61 years ... They’ve been very good years.”