

GURWIN HEALTHCARE SYSTEM PRESIDENT AND CEO STUART B. ALMER

LIFE CYCLES

BY CLAUDE SOLNIK

Amid an aging Long Island population and with more retirees seeking to stay close to home, the Gurwin Healthcare System is expanding. Gurwin President and CEO Stuart B. Almer talked with the *Press* about their latest addition, Fountaingate Gardens, its certification as a life plan community, and other changes, as Gurwin widens the population it serves.

Gurwin has been certified as a life plan community. What does that mean? A life plan community, formerly known as a continuing care retirement community, or CCRC, is a special designation that combines three key services. It includes independent living, such as Fountaingate Gardens; assisted living, and skilled nursing/rehabilitation. Once we formed our independent living community, we applied to New York State for this designation.

What does that designation mean to Gurwin and its residents? The designation allows us to promote and sell a life care contract to those residents who wish to have it. That means once someone moves into Fountaingate Gardens, if they purchase this life care option, services at our assisted living community or nursing and rehabilitation center are covered, should they ever need them. It provides a certain sense of security financially and in terms of healthcare, plus it guarantees access. Most of the individuals who joined Fountaingate Gardens as members see tremendous value in the life care contract.

How many of these life plan communities are there in New York?

Gurwin is the most recent life plan community developed in New York State, so we're number 13 in the state and one of only four on Long Island. In total, Fountaingate Gardens includes 129 residential units in two buildings: The Terraces includes 27 apartments, and The Parkview includes 102 units. The third building, The Clubhouse, provides members access to fine dining in our bistro and Fireside Restaurant, our main dining room; a salon, a saltwater heated pool, a fitness center, an art studio, a library, pickleball and bocce courts, and very nice indoor and outdoor relaxation areas. Many of our



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members come from neighboring communities, and join us after selling their homes, because they want a stress-free, socially active and luxurious lifestyle. They're a very active, engaged group.

When did you develop Fountaingate Gardens? Ground clearing began in January 2021 and we opened in May 2022. To date we've sold 76 units of 129, with a number of folks expected to move in this summer. We're anticipating our occupancy to climb nicely, and will have a good number of units sold by the fall.

How did you fund this? Fountaingate Gardens was built with bond financing totaling just over \$100 million.

Apartment home entry fees begin at around \$450,000.

Where is the community located?

Fountaingate Gardens is in Commack on the 36-acre Gurwin campus. Also on the campus is a 460-bed skilled nursing and rehabilitation center, as well as our 210-apartment assisted living community. The campus also houses our new Corporate Center and a sewage treatment plant servicing all our buildings.

Why are you expanding your assisted living community?

We've seen growing competition in the area, and it's a way for us to continue to expand and compete while offering members of the community another option

for their assisted living needs. The expansion created 18 new studio apartments within the physical structure of the facility, bringing us to 210 apartments. This enables us to offer a lower price point while still providing access to all the services and amenities within the community.

When did you become the Gurwin Healthcare System and what does that mean?

Approximately five years ago, since we were expanding our services well beyond our flagship nursing home, our board decided to form a parent corporation to manage all services under the Gurwin umbrella. Everything we do falls under the parent company, Gurwin Healthcare System.

Have you made acquisitions?

Three years ago, we acquired Island Nursing and Rehab Center, a 120-bed skilled nursing facility located in Holtsville, about 20 minutes east of the Gurwin campus. Having the parent structure in place allowed us to manage this acquisition efficiently and provide appropriate oversight and reporting.

How do you find good people as employees at the new facility?

Staffing in the healthcare industry hasn't been easy over the past few years, but thankfully this has not been an issue for us in our new independent living community. We've been able to recruit, attract and retain staff, and they have developed wonderful relationships with our members. It's a little different in our other facilities, especially in the nursing and rehabilitation centers, where everyone in the industry is having challenges recruiting and retaining staff. We do see some promising signs, so I'm hopeful for the future.

Any plans for the future?

Fountaingate Gardens was built with a plan that includes the potential for further expansion. That is something that remains in consideration. The Corporate Center on our campus was a recent acquisition, and we've been looking at other opportunities. The current market, staffing, etc. has us constantly revisiting those plans. It's a fluid process. We will always look at potential opportunities, as long as they fit in with our mission.