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Not your parents' retirement home

Baby boomers are rejecting old-school seniors' residences

By LISA FATTORI SPECIAL TO SUN MEDIA

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The discriminating tastes of today's aging baby boomers are redefining the model for retirement residences. Affluent, active and used to the finer things in life, this rising demographic is not looking for a room in an institutional setting but rather for comfortable living spaces with high-end finishes and ample amenities — a home that mirrors the one they live in now.

"Seniors' residences today are not the retirement homes that your parents or grandparents moved into," says Renée Bourgon, director of marketing and communications for Davies Smith Developments. "Baby boomers want a resort lifestyle, with every service imaginable right at their fingertips." That developer's Hearthstone by the Bay offers just that — luxury retirement living with hotel-like services and amenities. Scheduled for occupancy this summer, the community features 145 condominium suites, a dining room with terrace, pub, library, greenhouse, cinema and fitness facility complete with a resistance pool. Imagine having someone to walk your dog, do your laundry, perform light housekeeping duties or deliver to your door a gourmet meal from the on-site restaurant. Airport pick-ups, valet service and dozens of other conveniences aim to provide residents with a carefree lifestyle.

And the on-site health and wellness centre lets residents keep up the type of fitness regime they're used to. "This centre emphasizes pro-active wellness and includes a spa and fitness classes, such as yoga," Bourgon says. "It's about staying active and healthy and living life to the fullest." Located just south of Lake Shore Blvd., Hearthstone by the Bay has a picturesque lakefront setting near downtown Toronto. In addition to enjoying the vibrancy of the city, residents have access to several on-site recreational venues. What's more, organized trips give people the opportunity to share new experiences and excursions with other Hearthstone homeowners.

Harmony Village, by City Core Developments Inc. and Invar Building Corporation, is another innovative community of condominiums and townhome residences that are designed to accommodate homeowners throughout their retirement years. Residents have access to a host of services, as they need them, so that they can remain in their homes even if they require in-home nursing care. "The generation approaching retirement can afford more and will demand more," says Jack Pong, president of City Core. "That's why we've built so many services into Harmony Village and have replaced the institutional feel of traditional senior residences with a high-quality complex that invokes a friendly village atmosphere."

The Harmony Village development team has partnered with the non-profit organization, St. Paul's L'Amoreaux Centre in Scarborough, to offer free and affordable, pay-per-use services to Harmony Village residences, as well as the local community. The new seniors' residence comprises two 20-storey towers, two nine-storey manors and a 50,000-square-foot community centre that will be managed by the Harmony Village Foundation and St. Paul's. The facility boasts over 150 recreational programs and offers everything from aqua-fit classes to an indoor promenade. There are lounge areas, outdoor terraces and garden plots — raised so that residents don't have to bend over as they work. The complex will be LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Gold, with solar panels, geothermal heating and cooling systems and environmentally friendly finishes. Fifty-five-year-old Prisca Wong and her husband are new purchasers at Harmony Village. Both work full-time and are looking forward to the convenience of living in a self-contained community.

"Harmony Village will give us a resort-hotel lifestyle and all of the programs and services that we could want," Wong says. "The community centre, medical centre, restaurants and retail shops and services make the village a one-stop location so that we don't have to go anywhere else." Pong says this is the new model for seniors' residences. "This community will show the Ministry of Health how improved services can actually reduce costs. Baby boomers are demanding more of their retirement residences and the services that are available to them. It's the way of the future."

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