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# Baby boomers are easing in to senior living communities

Patti Singer // April 18, 2023

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 (mailto:?subject=Baby boomers are easing in to senior living communities&body=Independent living doesn't have to be a family home with a driveway that has to be plowed and a lawn that needs mowing. It can be an apartment or patio... You can read the content in details following link https%3A%2F%2Frbj.net%2F2023%2F04%2F18%2Fbaby-boomers-easing-into-senior-living-communities%2F)

Independent living doesn't have to be a family home with a driveway that has to be plowed and a lawn that needs mowing. It can be an apartment or patio home where the maintenance is taken care of, freeing up time for more enjoyable activities.

As baby boomers who brought their parents on a tour a few years ago are learning, moving to a senior community doesn't have to be the reaction to a crisis. It can come while you're in the peak of health and can be a way to enjoy life.



"Our grandmas, and our parents even, did not think about their senior years as a period in their life," said Lisa Marcello, president and chief executive officer of [Episcopal SeniorLife Communities](#). "You just sort of went from being active and young to old. Now being a senior is a lifestyle. People are living longer, and it's a pretty long period of time between 50 and potentially 80, 90 or 100. A large group of people are thinking, 'What do I want my lifestyle to be?'"

No longer called facilities, independent-living residences for older adults are senior communities and the marketing approach is designed to build relationships and show what an unencumbered lifestyle might look like: An invitation to Geva or the George Eastman House, or offering meeting space to local organizations or welcoming neighbors to activities.

Marcello



(<https://rbj.net/files/2023/04/Troy-Hollar-.jpg>)  
Hollar

"Bringing folks into the community over time, introducing them to the people, getting them to understand and maybe participate in the culture of that community, they get a sense of 'Wow, these are people I really want to spend time with and these are things that I would love to be doing and these are spaces that I would love to be moving in'," said Troy Hollar, national director of marketing for Watermark Retirement Communities.

The company has properties in Rochester and across the country, some of which have art galleries and performance spaces available to the public.

"It provides them with those experiences that feel good and enable them to experience that can help with that decision-making process," he said. "Two years down the road when they think, 'you know what, I think it might be time for me to start looking around and thinking seriously about this,' we're in the back of their mind or at the top of their list."

Making the decision for yourself rather than a parent alters the calculus.



Krebbeks

Stephanie Krebbeks, sales manager for senior housing at St. John's Senior Living & Care, said that after taking a tour with a parent an adult child is more open to the possibility of living there at some point, "because it's something they want. When you want it, it's more pleasant to accept that thought into your mind. If it's perceived as a need, you tend to push back a little bit. I think sometimes it's easier to have the adult child who's accompanying their parent for a tour to already be thinking in the back of their mind about how they can incorporate some of these things into their future."

Most of the calls from boomers for themselves are about independent living — which lets seniors do what they want to do when they want do it but adds conveniences such as housekeeping and meals if desired. Medical services are not part of independent living.

While people in their 60s start researching options, most people say they are have at least a five-year horizon and the move-in age tends to be 75 or older. Krebbeks said she's not sure why they pick a specific age, other than "we tend to use our own parents as our bar."

Moving to a senior community might in some ways alleviate some of the issues that arise as people age — often alone — which is one reason Marcello said ESLC is focused on the earlier senior years.

"We truly believe as the health care side of our business says, in order to mitigate some of the risk of those catastrophic events that occur as you age, having a healthy lifestyle, good socialization, great relationships and experiences in the earlier years will mitigate some of those incidents later in life."

While the senior communities have just about any activity an active older adult would want, their offerings extend beyond the property line and encourage residents and neighbors to get to know each other.

McGinness

"We have neighborhood programs where seniors in the community are able to take advantage of our services," said Courtney McGinness, vice president of marketing and community engagement at ESLC. "There's an open invitation for seniors to be a part of our organization in any of the neighborhoods in which we operate. So they are experiencing firsthand what it's like to be a part of the organization."



The exposure offers the older adult who is still in the family home the possibility that there's another way to live.

"I think that many people do feel like if they're going to make this shift themselves, that they are giving up on the life that they have had and kind of entering this new zone where their life will be different," said Hollar of Watermark. "Our job is to show them how great that different and new life can be."

The lifestyle is becoming more accessible to low- and middle-income seniors through competitive state programs that provide tax credits to developers of affordable housing for independent living.

Rochester's Cornerstone Group, which recently broke ground on the 150-unit Marketplace Senior Apartments in Henrietta, has communities throughout New York and in Pennsylvania. It recently opened a 60-unit complex in Sennett, Cayuga County, for low-to middle-income seniors aged 55 and older



Brandt

"You'd walk in there and say this is drop-dead gorgeous," said President Roger Brandt. The complex has a fitness center, game room and the same finishes and furniture of market-rate communities.

"This doesn't look like what people used to think of as an affordable housing project," he said. "You couldn't walk in and differentiate between that and the people that might make an \$80,000 pension as opposed to a \$30,000 pension."

Residents need to qualify for the affordable units. Brandt said that based on the aging population, he expects demand for affordable senior living to increase. "If you think about middle America, that's a big chunk of the population."

Regardless of people's income, their reasons for seeking a senior community tend to be the same.

Brandt said he often hears that people don't want to move too far but think: "I'd like to move out into some place that's going to be easier."

Krebbeks of St. John's said that many people don't appreciate the possibilities of living in a senior community until they do it.

ould bottle what it feels like to be here and pass that out as a parting gift to every tour I give and just say, take a sip, call me tomorrow. I think that they would reconsider their timing," she said. "Everyone says why didn't I do this sooner? We still have that stigma about senior housing that it's just the place where the older people live and play Bingo and it is so not that."

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