

# Getting Better With Age

Senior housing developments are evolving to meet the future needs of discriminating residents

By REBECCA L. RHOADES

**A**merica is aging. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's National Population Projections, in the next few decades, 1 in every 5 residents will be older than age 65, a number that's projected to outpace those younger than 18 for the first time in history.

"There are 10,000 people turning 65 every day in our country," notes Sharon Harper, chairman, CEO and co-founder of Plaza Companies, which develops and manages three retirement communities in Arizona: Vi at Grayhawk and Vi at Silverstone, both in Scottsdale, and Splendido at Rancho Vistoso in Tucson. "By 2050, the senior population will have doubled to 90 million." More specifically, the number of adults ages 85 and older will nearly quadruple. And as people age, their needs — from housing to wellness — change. To keep up with these ever-shifting lifestyles, senior living communities are also evolving, offering innovative care models, an abundance of amenities and levels of luxury previously unheard of in both independent- and assisted-living environments.

## FOCUS ON LOCATION

Traditionally, age-restricted communities were located outside of urban centers, but members of the baby boomer generation — now ages 57-75 — don't wish to give up all of the conveniences and activities of everyday life.

When Mirabella at ASU welcomed its first residents in December 2020, it signaled an exciting new category of senior living. Developed in partnership with the ASU Foundation, the 630,000-square-foot 20-story high-rise complex sits on university land and caters to adults ages 62 and older who wish to maintain an active and intellectually stimulating lifestyle. "There's a



MIRABELLA AT ASU



# HEALTHCARE BUILDING

certain energy that comes with living on a university campus,” says Paul Riepma, senior vice president of sales and marketing for Pacific Retirement Services. “Arizona State University’s vision was to serve a broader community, not just 18-to-22-year-olds. Each person who lives here has a Mirabella at ASU student ID card that provides them access to about 200 different classes, passes to the school’s library and museums, and preferred seating to entertainment and sporting events.”

In 2014, LivGenerations opened its first Valley community in the heart of AgriTopia in Gilbert. The desirable garden neighborhood is not only popular with young families but also provides easy access to numerous restaurants, golf, shopping and transportation. The company is currently completing construction on its fourth Arizona development. Located on Mayo Boulevard, it’s minutes away from Mayo Clinic and near an active corner of North Scottsdale Road. “We really thought methodically about where we’re going to place our communities,” says Sonya Paterno, regional director of sales for LivGenerations. “The traditional model of senior living isn’t what people want these days. We still cater to a mature population in a communal-type setting, but the residents want to have fun and have access to all of the amenities they’re used to.”

## RESORT-STYLE LIVING

Along with location, seniors expect to maintain the same high level of comfort they experienced in their family homes. They seek boutique offerings that focus on unique experiences rather than one-size-fits-all decor and dining.

At Mirabella at ASU, living quarters are on par with the Valley’s poshest apartment complexes, with high ceilings, walls of windows and top-notch appointments. Founding residents were able to suggest structural changes to their homes, such as the removal of walls, and select lighting, cabinetry and finishes.

Sagewood, a Life Plan Community recently completed a 3.5-acre expansion at its northeast Phoenix

property, which included 101 independent living apartments, a new restaurant, conference and game rooms, an art studio and an 18-hole putting course. Residents in the addition could upgrade everything from countertops to flooring, if they desired. “Some of the homes are very customized,” says Ellen Devine, director of marketing for Sagewood.

While independent living quarters offer fully equipped kitchens, today’s senior facilities also feature multiple on-site restaurants, ranging from 24-hour delis to fine dining. Many are also open to the public. Full-service spas, beauty salons, indoor and outdoor swimming pools, game rooms, wine cellars, hallways lined with rotating exhibits of original art, high-end furnishings in public spaces, dog parks and electric vehicle charging stations are just a few of the many other high-end amenities developers

are incorporating to attract discerning residents in a competitive market.

## A LIFETIME OF CARE

According to a study by the National Investment Center for Seniors Housing & Care, as the population ages, 8% will have cognitive impairments, 60% will have mobility limitations and 20% will have high needs, defined as three or more chronic conditions and one or more limitations of daily living. Developers of senior housing are anticipating those needs and incorporating advanced treatment centers into their projects.

At Mirabella, Vi at Grayhawk and Vi at Silverstone, and LivGenerations, for example, the first step of occupancy is independent living. As acuity decreases, residents can then move into assisted living apartments, memory care or skilled nursing rooms, or even hospice, all with 24-hour on-site



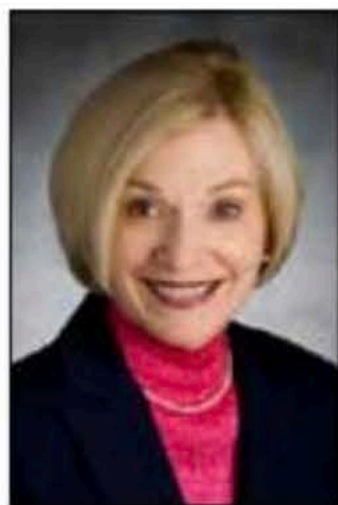
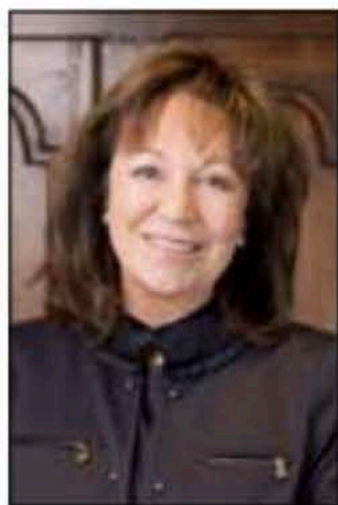
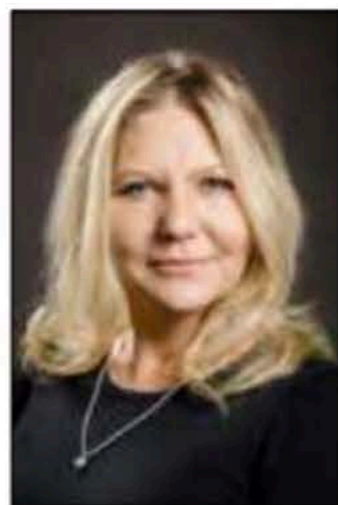
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## HEALTHCARE BUILDING

**Luke Bourlon****Ellen Devine****Sharon Harper****Sonya Paterno****Paul Riepma**

medical professionals. “It’s not the most pleasant subject to talk about, but if you don’t have all the different levels of health and home care, then you run the risk that residents are going to have a medical problem that can’t be addressed,” says Riepma. This combination of care also eliminates concerns of finding last-minute treatment facilities and allows spouses and partners to remain near their loved ones, offering a greater peace of mind for family members.

### POST-PANDEMIC PROTECTION

“One of the things we’re cognizant of going forward is that a lot of the services that our residents would go to to receive are now coming to them,” says Luke Bourlon, president of development for Sparrow Partners, which will be delivering its first senior living units in Arizona this summer in

Surprise. The company also has three other projects under construction in Goodyear, Glendale and Mesa. “Take telemedicine, for example. The pandemic has really accelerated the use of technology to provide on-demand physician services without needing to leave home.”

During the past year, as senior living facilities struggled to contain the spread of the coronavirus, Wi-Fi programs kept residents connected to staff; provided in-home access to daily exercise and educational classes; and allowed them to select menu options, with the meals then delivered to their apartments.

As part of its expansion, Sagewood launched its EverSafe 360° program, which incorporates state-of-the-art indoor air-quality systems. “It’s not anything visible to the residents, but it’s a nice feeling, especially during the time of a pandemic when they’re

still living in their home and getting ready to make a move to our Phase II addition,” says Devine “Because, let’s face it, people have been scared.”

Outdoor spaces also played a vital role in mental health maintenance. Sagewood offered concerts and bingo nights that residents could enjoy from their balconies, while one of Sparrow’s design mandates is to include enough private outdoor spaces for each unit. Ground floor apartments have private yards, and each development includes a large 6-to-10-acre courtyard with multiple covered patios.

Harper notes that the \$50 million renovation and expansion of Splendido at Rancho Vistoso was about three-quarters complete when the pandemic struck. “In the case of the villas, we were right on track adding separate heating and cooling systems, sterile hard-surface countertops and infrared lighting,” she explains “Other elements that were helpful in our communities — and this will certainly be enhanced as we go forward — are indoor-outdoor spaces. We always develop our buildings with a sense of wellness factor. During the height of the pandemic, we did ask our residents to stay in their homes, but we also had a lot of private outdoor spaces where they could get fresh air.” Touchless fixtures, automatic doors and sanitizing stations are also becoming commonplace in senior living facilities.

“People are living longer, and they’re much more active between the ages of 75 and 100 than they were 40 years ago,” Riepma says. “They want to remain relevant instead of cocooning in a walled-off retirement community. Seniors today expect more out of their later years.” ■ ■ ■

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