

At home in Eden

Residents receive care and companionship

By Randy Howard
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Eden Park may not have the glamour of a Club Med. It certainly isn't as posh as Trump Tower.

But to 116 residents, many of whom are suffering from a myriad of chronic illnesses, it offers riches of a different sort.

Take William Fisher. He couldn't be happier with his daily routine, whiling away the morning hours under a carport and a tempest of White Owl cigars. His only worries are how he looks in his protective apron, and the passing wheelchairs that threaten to run over his toes.

Minor trade-offs for a spot by the front entrance of



Randy Howard

William Fisher enjoys a cigar while sitting near the front entrance of Eden Park.

Eden Park, which houses the elderly, the sick, those who can no longer take care of themselves alone.

In his fourth-floor room overlooking Warren Street, Fisher inches past the dresser and feels for the vinyl corner chair. Though he is legally blind — he has lost his sight steadily during the last four years — he can see traces of light and outlines of shadows. And he knows his way around.

"That's King Henry VIII's Gate at Windsor Castle. I took the snapshot first and did the painting later," he said.

Fisher recalled some of his most memorable experiences while we were within earshot of the bustling nurse's aides and a woman singing a Pat Boone-like melody across the hall.

"They told me that when I got to London, I'd better be careful because I could get lost easily," he said. "I didn't get lost. It just seemed like a large, friendly city to me."

A tree surgeon who worked up and down the East Coast in the 1920s, Fisher's own tree business fell through after the stock market crashed. He served a brief period in the army in the early '30s, then went to work for a dairy in Saratoga, an outfit that, according to Fisher, "made a delicious cottage cheese."

If Fisher can't be found smoking in his folding chair in the front yard, he may be in his room listening to the headphones.

His four-track mysteries by Agatha Christie, Peter Windsor and the lot consume his afternoons. If there isn't anything he likes on the television by 8 p.m., he tunes in "MacNeil/Lehrer."

Fisher said his only complaint is that everybody living at Eden Park seems to be deaf. While the aides are extremely considerate, they are constantly shouting at the residents who are hard-of-hearing.

Administrator Lloyd Cote understands that Eden Park isn't a godsend for all the live-ins.

"People don't look forward to this. It's not like coming to Disneyland," said Cote, whose grandmother resides at the nursing home. But, he said, for some people it's the best attention they've had in a while.

"We're just local people taking care of local people," he added.

On average, Eden Park admits two to three new residents each month. Many of them arrive apprehensive. They long for the familiarity of their own homes and are anxious among strange faces.

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Fortunately, the nurse's aides are trained to help lessen the stress of each transition.

As part of a proprietary corporation based in Albany, Eden Park has served more than 1,000 area residents since 1971.

An array of rehabilitation services, including speech, occupational and physical therapy, as well as medical and dental services, is designed to maintain and improve the health of each resident. A beautician and a barber visit the facilities, and a steady diet of activities is a fundamental cornerstone of life.

"Sometimes they go up to Lake George and take rides on the boats," Cote said. And "they've been to Saratoga Race Track a couple of times."

The resident dog, a black Labrador named Capri, also makes her rounds daily. She is alleged to have a human-like understanding of how the elevator works.

Still, a pleasant quadriped with a bandana draped around her neck isn't all Eden Park has to offer.

Eighty-year-old Irene Moran spends Tuesday mornings baking and Wednesdays sewing. Currently she's patchworking a quilt made of donated fabric that is to be raffled off at Christmas time.

"I like to sew," Moran said from the activities room table. "I also like to play bingo. I win a lot of times."

As treasurer of the Resident

Council, Moran doesn't let her disabilities throw her off stride.

A diabetic with a chronic heart disorder, she lists among her duties collecting volunteer money at the monthly meetings. In the past the money has been used to purchase coffee and doughnuts, erect a flagpole for the building and cover veterinarian and food costs for Capri.

"I like being treasurer; I just don't like having to ask people for money all the time," she said.

She doesn't mind the food — pizza is her favorite — but she misses her 11th-floor apartment at Stichman Towers, and her friends from the complex who still visit her periodically.

After seven years at the home, she

is ambivalent at times, uncertain of the future and its potentially bleak offerings.

"Sometimes I like living here; sometimes I don't. I get disgusted when I look around at the other people. I wonder if I'm going to end up like them."

A honest concern, according to Cote.

"You've seen the ad on television: 'I've fallen and I can't get up.' Well, it happens to people like these," Cote said, "only the trend now is that they are coming in sicker."

Many of the residents may have had home health care in the past, and admissions are often precipitated after a caretaker becomes ill or is unable to provide

service, Cote added.

Yet that's something Gertrude Bennett can't rave enough about.

A former millworker from Ticonderoga, the 100-year-old woman recalls an afternoon she had fallen at her son's house while home alone. She was attempting to get out of her wheelchair when she lost her footing. Luckily she had a telephone in hand.

"I told my son's friend to tell Robert (her son) that his mother has fallen on the floor and can't get up. You should have seen all the people that came to help me."

To live in a state of perpetual supervision is a veritable blessing to Bennett.

"It's lovely here. You couldn't ask for a better place to stay when

you don't feel well," she said.

Like Moran, Bennett enjoys playing bingo. She spends the other days hand-painting circular suncatchers. On Wednesdays she goes to the resident beauty parlor to get her hair done.

"I don't like white hair," she admitted. "It's all right for some people, but I just don't care for it."

As the nurse's aide was coming to take her outside for a photograph, Bennett explained that her wheelchair is her "car" and that sometimes she likes to "drive her own car."

"I don't feel 100, really I don't," Bennett said, laughing.

"I don't think of troubles; I just take it one day at a time."