



**MKM**

**architecture + design**

for living.

# *Senior Independent Living Strategies:*

## **Reflecting Contemporary Consumer Demand**

By Dodd Kattman, AIA, LEED AP  
MKM architecture + design (Dec. 2011)

---

### **Introduction**

Consumer preference for independent living accommodations located within continuing care retirement communities (CCRC's) is rapidly changing. This paper reflects upon the evolution of CCRC's and considers recent trends, sources of competition, and potential solutions that will enhance demand for independent living.

In the fall of 2010, the American Association for Homes and Services for the Aging (AAHSA) changed their name to "Leading Age". This refined identity echoes their stated goal to "advance policies, promote practices and conduct research that supports, enables and empowers people to live fully as they age". The holistic declaration invites the not-for-profit CCRCs that they serve to explore new strategies that reach beyond their traditional property lines, thus enabling them to become true "community centers for successful aging". In order to be successful on this journey, organizations should reflect on the path already taken, understand the recent

trends and preferences of the individuals that they serve, and consider new and innovative solutions to satisfy changing market demand.

Simply stated, CCRC's may no longer be able to depend upon the anticipated emergence of baby boomers to satisfy the desired occupancy levels of traditional independent living accommodations.

### **The Path Already Taken**

Many of the earliest senior housing and care providers began as church-sponsored communities caring for aging clergy. Later, these institutions expanded to serve parishioners, offering housing and care in exchange for a nominal fee or personal assets. One early example is the Eliza Huntington Memorial Home of Norwich, Connecticut which dates back to the early nineteenth century (See figure 1). Their mission was stated as "A home for respectable and indigent, aged and infirmed females."



Figure 1: Eliza Huntington Memorial Home, Norwich, CT

In 1935, the passage of the Social Security Act provided a stable source of income for many seniors. Three decades later the enactment of the Medicaid/Medicare program became a financial pillar of the American health care system by creating entitlements to pay for senior's rehabilitation care and nursing services for those in financial need. Consequently, between the years 1970 and 2000, personal private pensions grew six times and the poverty level of those ages 65+ decreased threefold.<sup>1</sup>

These new sources of personal income and federal entitlements helped Americans to pay for age-qualified housing and long-term care services. Additionally, changing social and cultural priorities enticed many traditional stay-at-home, care providing, siblings to join the working class. As a result, fewer family members were available at home to care for mom or dad. It is no surprise that the national expansion of long-term care providers and CCRCs parallel these events and independent living unit construction flourished.

### **Recent Trends and Personal Engagement**

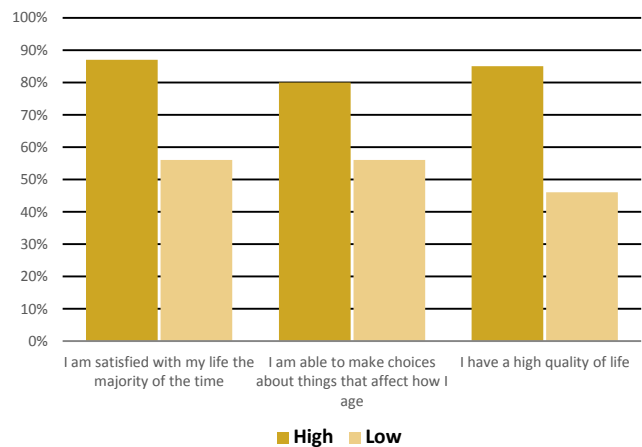
Demographers often anticipate that senior housing and care providers have the potential to serve, at best, approximately ten percent of age and income qualified seniors.<sup>2</sup> In 1999, a study conducted by the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University found that less

than three percent of the 70 or older elderly households reside in age-restricted "assisted" communities.<sup>3</sup>

For those deciding to make a housing change that is not grounded in the immediate need for assistance, fifty-four percent of seniors cited companionship, an improved social life, and a relief from boredom as the reasons for their move.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the vast majority of those ages fifty-five and older responded that they do not want to live in a community that legally limits the age of its residents.

This preference is made more evident by the findings of a recent community engagement study sponsored by AARP.<sup>5</sup> The report concluded that those who were highly engaged in their community were much more satisfied with their quality of life and their ability to make positive choices (see figure 2).

Figure 2:  
Community Engagement Outcomes



In 2008, the Center on Aging and Community<sup>6</sup> surveyed Indiana residents over the age of 60. The results concluded that these individuals are very active. The report found that, in the last week:

<sup>3</sup> Robert Schafer, *Determinants of the Living Arrangements of the Elderly*, Joint Center for Housing Studies, Harvard University, June 1999.. Assisted communities in this study can be qualified by those who offer or provide some level of care or assistance.

<sup>4</sup> The American Seniors Housing Association, *The Independent Living Report* (2009).

<sup>5</sup> AARP/Roper Public Affairs & Media Group of NOP World, *Beyond 50.05 Survey*, (2004), 44.

<sup>6</sup> "AdvantAge Initiative Community Survey in Indiana," *The AdvantAge Initiative: Improving Communities for an Aging Society*, 2008.

<sup>1</sup> Susan B. Brecht, *Analyzing Seniors' Housing Markets* (Urban Land Institute, 2002), 5-6.

<sup>2</sup> Tim Stair, e-mail message to author, February 2011.

- 88% engaged in at least one cultural, religious, or social activity.
- 67% attended movies, sporting events, or group events.
- 57% attended church, temple, or other.
- 39% participated in volunteer work (18% more than 10 hours a week).

This notion of successful aging and engagement produces very tangible outcomes. In 2004, the AARP *Beyond 50.05 Survey* found that those who felt “very attached” to a community volunteered their time more than twice as often as those who felt disconnected, and were also nearly twice as likely to donate money to local organizations.<sup>7</sup> Community engagement and the maintenance of personal social networks therefore are primary considerations for independent living options that are truly places of meaning.

### **Competition**

The economy will soon improve and an increasing number of seniors will be presented with a more advantageous market in which to sell their own homes and make a lifestyle change. CCRCs who attempt to attract these consumers will face competition that is very different, and more pervasive than that previously experienced.

One source of competition that is enticing people to stay in their home is the “Village to Village Network” ([www.vtvnetwork.org](http://www.vtvnetwork.org)). These membership-driven, grass roots organizations are run by volunteers and paid staff. Their goal is to provide support for individuals wishing to stay in their own home. For their members, they coordinate access to affordable services including transportation, health and wellness programs, home repairs, social and educational activities, and trips. These individual villages claim “one-stop shopping, doing everything and anything that their members need”.<sup>8</sup> As of the spring of 2011, fifty villages have been established in the United States with over six hundred in development.



Figure 3: Beacon Hill Village, Boston, MA  
Photo by MKM (2009)

In May of 2011, Smart Money Magazine, published an article supporting the growing relevance of Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs). The article states “Forget the Springfield Retirement Castle. With no desire to leave their homes, a growing number of older Americans are banding together to create retirement communities in their existing neighborhoods. Better yet, many are finding governments and non-profits willing to provide many of the same services retirement homes charge thousands for.”<sup>9</sup>

NORCs are generally located in urban environments offering convenient pedestrian access to shopping and services that are necessary to independent seniors. Often times paid staff or organizations (like a Village-to-Village cohort) coordinate the diversity and availability of desired programs and services. One of the best known examples of a NORC is Beacon Hill Village in Boston, MA. (see figure 3).<sup>10</sup> In addition to the programs and services offered by Beacon Hill Village, residents are drawn to its location in the heart of downtown Boston in spite of the neighborhood’s hilly terrain which is quite contrary to the barrier-free landscapes generally associated with senior living campuses.

NORCs provide tangible evidence in support of social engagement. A recent survey<sup>11</sup> illustrated that those living in NORCs, when comparing their current lifestyle to their previous location, reported:

<sup>7</sup> Prisuta, R., “Enhancing Volunteerism among Aging Boomers,” *Reinventing Aging: Baby Boomers and Civic Engagement*, Boston: Harvard School of Public Health (2004), pp. 47–89.

<sup>8</sup> “About,” Village to Village Network, <http://www.vtvnetwork.org> accessed March, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Catey Hill, “The Stealth Retirement Community,” *Smart Money Magazine*, May 16, 2011, <http://www.smartmoney.com/retirement/planning/the-stealth-retirement-community-1305320334195/>

<sup>10</sup> Beacon Hill Village, <http://www.beaconhillvillage.org/>.

<sup>11</sup> Survey results by United Jewish Communities (UJC), as presented at the 2007 Joint Conference of the American Society on Aging and the National Council on the Aging (2007)

- 88% talked to more people
- 84% participated in more activities
- 95% know more about their communities' services
- 70% feel healthier and more active

These responses are likely consistent with those that a CCRC might reveal with their own engaged residents.

Another growing source of competition that is fueled by growing governmental reimbursement which is enticing residents to stay in their own home is home-based services. The United States Department of Labor reports a growth in home health employment of 67% in the first decade of the twenty-first century.<sup>12</sup> Part of this growth can be attributed to Leading Age member organizations since nearly ¾ of the top 100 providers reported offering home based services.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the service organizations mentioned, technology companies are continuing to pursue this growing marketplace with products that offer dependable communication systems, medication reminders, dietary assistance, mobility aids, and access to emergency response providers, etc. Nearly all of these products are designed to further enable an aging person to stay at home.

### **Potential Solutions**

With this information in mind, how might future independent living candidates differ from those of the past? It is likely that potential independent living residents will be less willing to move to an age-segregated campus. Additionally, residents moving to CCRC's will be older, more frail, require more services, and will demand an independent lifestyle. Becoming a "Community Center for Successful Aging" will require new forms of community outreach, partnerships, and change.

A recent example of CCRC's changing their strategic focus to attract tomorrow's independent living resident includes the development of housing options and supportive services within intergenerational, pedestrian-centered, urban environments.

Landis Homes, a full service CCRC located in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, is converting an urban, brown field site into senior housing. This initiative will include a satellite home health office to combat wasteful "windshield time", which is the wasteful time accrued by home-health providers driving from location to remote location. This style of living appeals to the non-traditional CCRC resident and offers a cost-efficient strategy to deliver home care services.

Rising Sun, Indiana (see figure 4) is developing enticing housing options within their central business district in an effort to appeal to this growing demographic. The reciprocal results of this strategy will both strengthen intergenerational living alternatives downtown and provide financial support for Main Street businesses who are offering products and services. A consortium of local business owners may join together to offer discounted monthly voucher packages for the residents.<sup>14</sup>



Figure 4: Rising Sun, Indiana Street View  
Photo by MKM (2010)

Grace Village Retirement Community is considering the expansion of existing attached, ground level congregate living apartments to include private garages and patio courts (see figure 5). The garages can be used as workshops, studios or storage rooms if and when driving is no longer feasible. The apartments are attractive to residents seeking an independent lifestyle, and those who understand that their physical or cognitive condition may soon require convenient connections to campus dietary and care services.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment, Hours and Earnings from the Current Employment Statistics Survey (National), [www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov) (2010).

<sup>13</sup> AAHSA Ziegler 100. "The nation's 100 largest not-for-profit multi-site senior living organizations", June 2010, 112.

<sup>14</sup> *Elder-Centric Villages: Exploring How Senior Housing Can Incentivize Urban Renewal in Rural America*, Morrison Kattman Menze, Inc. (2011).

### **Conclusion**

In a recent survey of the mission statements of various Leading Age members throughout the state of Indiana, the following topics (in order of frequency) outline the core principles of respective campuses and organizations:<sup>15</sup>

1. Spirituality/Christian (58%)
2. Quality of Care (45%)
3. Dignity (30%)
4. Safety (19%)
5. Place of Growth and Meaning (11%)

Many of the solutions cited in this paper deviate radically from traditional CCRC practices, however none conflict with the core principles listed above.

This information should be considered by CCRC providers who are evaluating new strategies to expand service to their constituents. It is critical that CCRC's continually seek new and relevant strategies that will attract tomorrow's residents. As stated on Leading Age's website home page, we are all dedicated to "expanding the world of possibilities for aging".<sup>16</sup>

### **About the Authors:**



#### **Dodd Kattman, AIA, LEED AP**

Dodd is President of MKM architecture + design, an architecture, planning and interior design firm offering over 20 years of senior living and care project experience. Through his role as senior living managing partner, Dodd dedicates time to design, research and presentation topics that elevate the expectations regarding how and what we build. Through this effort, he continues searches to create supportive environments that promote the process of aging with dignity, in community.

### **Resources:**

- Au AAHSA Ziegler 100, *The nation's 100 largest not-for-profit multi-site senior living organizations*, 2010.
- AARP/Roper Public Affairs & Media Group of NOP World, *Beyond 50.05 Survey*, 2004.
- The AdvantAge Initiative: *Improving Communities for an Aging Society*, AdvantAge Initiative Community Survey in Indiana, 2008.
- The American Seniors Housing Association, *The Independent Living Report*, 2009.
- Beacon Hill Village, <http://www.beaconhillvillage.org/>. 2011.
- Brecht, S. B. *Analyzing Seniors' Housing Markets*, Urban Land Institute, 2002.
- Hill, Catey. *The Stealth Retirement Community*, Smart Money Magazine, 2011.  
<http://www.smartmoney.com/retirement/planning/the-stealth-retirement-community-1305320334195/>
- LeadingAge, <http://www.leadingage.org>, 2011.
- Morrison Kattman Menze, Inc., *Elder-Centric Villages: Exploring How Senior Housing Can Incentivize Urban Renewal in Rural America*, 2011.
- Morrison Kattman Menze, Inc., *Environments for Aging Annual Conference, Closing Keynote Address*, 2011.
- Prisuta, R. *Enhancing Volunteerism among Aging Boomers*, Reinventing Aging: Baby Boomers and Civic Engagement, Boston: Harvard School of Public Health, 2004.
- Schafer, Robert. *Determinants of the Living Arrangements of the Elderly*, Joint Center for Housing Studies, Harvard University, June 1999.
- Stair, T. B. 2011.
- United Jewish Communities (UJC), as presented at the 2007 Joint Conference of the American Society on Aging and the National Council on the Aging, 2007.
- U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment, Hours and Earnings from the Current Employment Statistics Survey (National), [www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov), 2010.
- Village to Village Network, <http://www.vtvnetwork.org>, 2011.

<sup>15</sup> Environments for Aging Annual Conference, Closing Keynote Address, Morrison Kattman Menze, Inc. (2011).

<sup>16</sup> "Home Page", LeadingAge, <http://www.leadingage.org>, accessed April 2011.