

Hillside community residents talk of relocating and ‘engaging with living’

By Erinn Hutkin

At age 76, Carol Welch is considered a newbie at Hillside, a Brookdale Continuing Care Retirement Community. After 30 years in the same three-bedroom house with a yard, she decided it was time to downsize.

So in September, 2015 Welch traded her house — and the work that came with it — for a one-bedroom apartment at Hillside. The new space is still big enough for her and her cat, she has room to complete crafts, and her unit is located on a courtyard with flowers and a patio, giving her access to the outdoors she loves.

Along the way, she’s met friendly people she chats with over morning coffee, and she’s had the chance to take part in community activities.

“(Downsizing) was a challenge, but I was ready for it,” Welch said. “It was easier than I thought... I have nothing but good things to say — I really haven’t regretted it.”

The Hillside community offers plentiful options for those looking to trade in the responsibilities of a too-big home. It’s an ideal place for retired folks to make new friends, get involved and continue learning and loving life.

Hillside rests on 57 acres near charming old town McMinnville. The campus houses two main buildings for Independent Living, The Manor and Traditions. In addition, 99 cottages are dotted across the 57 acres. The land also offers green space, a community garden, walking paths and an outdoor swimming pool.

Recent improvements to the 300-plus resident community have made Hillside even more attractive, explained Nikki Phillips, director of Sales and Marketing. The expansion of the community fitness center was completed in March 2016. The center now offers nearly 4,000-square feet of space, including a dedicated yoga studio and space for large group fitness classes for those at every fitness level. There is a cardio and weight-training area with new equipment and smaller classrooms for more education classes, including brain fitness, which is popular among the residents.

Future projects include a bocce ball court and an art studio. In addition, remodeling is underway on individual apartments. Phillips said each unit is “being gutted and taken down to bare bones.” Once rebuilt, these residences will have the latest features, such as granite kitchen countertops and stainless steel appliances.

Currently, spacious one-bedroom with den apartments are available at the Traditions building, many of which have outdoor patios. Several cottage homes are available as well.

“One of the primary benefits of Hillside is that an entry fee secures care for life. As residents age and their needs change, they may transfer into one of the care communities,” Phillips said.

As a Continuing Care Retirement Community, Hillside offers different levels of care, including Independent Living, Assisted Living, Alzheimer’s and Dementia Care and Rehabilitation and Skilled Nursing.

Still, Phillips said what makes Hillside truly unique is the engagement among residents. “The people who’ve chosen Hillside are so engaged in living,” she said. “When you’re here, you can feel the laughter. You can feel the interest in continuing to learn... People aren’t just sitting around — they are living their lives.”

That’s especially true for Kent and Darlene Kitts, who’ve lived in their Hillside apartment for eight years. They were drawn by the beauty of the campus and its living options.

Since moving, they’ve become active members of the community. They both sing in the choir, and are involved in a hand-bell group. Meanwhile, Darlene Kitts, 80, has learned to play ukulele. She’s been part of conversation groups and led various committees, such as one that works with dining staff to make improvements and meet residents’ dietary needs.

She was also recently asked to travel to Tampa for a conference hosted by Brookdale Senior Living, the community’s parent company. There she met company managers and residents from Brookdale communities nationwide and shared her thoughts on the living experience.

“We are just as happy as clams. We love it here,” Darlene Kitts said. “Living here has opened up doors...and given me opportunities for leadership I’ve never had before. We have never been so busy, but we just love it.”

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