

## Multigenerational living

# 'Together as a family'

BY MICHELE LEMER

Special To The Washington Post  
Like many families who experienced the severe disruption of the coronavirus pandemic, Janice and Don Markell made a major life change by asking Janice's mother to live with them, accelerating their plan for an eventual move to Florida.

"We were living in Montvale, New Jersey, and my mother was in assisted living nearby, but she wasn't able to leave, and we couldn't visit her," says Janice, 61. "Our son has lived in Lakewood Ranch near Sarasota for a few years, and we planned to move there eventually ourselves."

The solution for the family is a newly built home in the Lake Club section of Lakewood Ranch designed specifically for multigenerational living.

"It was very important for my mom to have her own space and privacy yet be with the family, too," Janice says. Edna, 91, has a wing with a living room, bedroom and bathroom as well as direct access to a lanai and to the kitchen. Janice's husband, Don, 74, is a real estate broker in New Jersey who plans to get his license in Florida. Spencer, their 26-year-old son, has his own wing in the house with a sitting room, bedroom and private bathroom.

"We didn't expect to do this so quickly, but we felt that the pandemic restrictions would last a long time, and we wanted to be together as a family," Janice says. The family spent \$1.7 million on their new home after selling their home and the home of Janice's mother in New Jersey, which had been empty while she was in assisted living.

Lakewood Ranch appealed to them because it's a multigenerational community specifically designed for a healthy lifestyle and activities for every

age group.

"We didn't want to be in an active-adult community," Janice says. "My mom said she was happy to move to Florida except she didn't want to be around 'old people' even though she's 91. We love being in a mixed-age community with lots of young families around."

The upheaval created by the coronavirus pandemic led to an increase in the number of homes purchased for multigenerational households, which rose to 15% between April and June 2020, according to the National Association of Realtors. That represents the highest percentage of multigenerational homes since NAR began tracking the trend in 2012 after the Great Recession and was up from 11% between July 2019 and March 2020.

Multigenerational households include adults bringing their parents to live with them for caregiving purposes or to help with child care. In addition, multigenerational households can include adult children living with their parents for cost savings or because they prefer to share a home. During the pandemic, NAR researchers found the top reason to purchase a multigenerational home was for aging parents to move into the home. Before the pandemic, multigenerational home purchasers were evenly split between those with adult children moving back home and aging parents.

### A family plan

Lakewood Ranch, one of the largest planned communities in the country with 50 square miles of property, has been the best-selling multigenerational community in the country for nine years, according to RCLCO, a real estate consulting firm. The community has more

than 41,000 residents; a hospital; schools; a main street with theaters, shops and restaurants; a farmers market; sports complex; the Sarasota Polo Club; three town centers; five neighborhood shopping centers; and more than 120 miles of trails.

"The decision to make Lakewood Ranch a multigenerational community rather than a retirement community was made 27 years ago when the development was first planned," says Laura Cole, senior vice president of LWR Communities, developers of Lakewood Ranch. "The planners wanted this to be a family-oriented community of primary residences, not a vacation home or retirement destination."

The planned community has 32 villages, with 40% of the land in the older villages designated as open space. Newer villages have 60% of their land designated for open space including parks and trails. Each village has its own amenities such as a swimming pool and fitness center. More than 60 clubs are available to join, and there are planned activities in the villages and for the entire community.

"Depending on what their priorities are, Lakewood Ranch offers something relatively affordable that checks all the boxes for their interests and hobbies," says Josh Graeve, vice president of sales for Pulte Group in the Southwest Florida market. Pulte sells multigenerational homes in three villages at Lakewood Ranch and sells homes in an age-restricted village for people 55 and older.

Cole moved to Lakewood Ranch a few years ago and then her parents moved into a home in one of the age-restricted villages.

"My own experience speaks to the intent of Lakewood Ranch to be multigenerational,"

Cole says. "My parents are close to doctors and everything else they need, and like the maintenance-free living. Eventually, if they need more care, they can move into one of the senior housing buildings in the community and I'll still be nearby."

The site plan for the community is designed with the goal that every home is within 1 1/2 miles of a grocery store and a neighborhood shopping center and within five miles of a town center, Cole says. Parks and trails connect the homes with the shopping areas, recreational amenities and schools. Homeowners pay \$15 annually to support a community activities organization that sponsors clubs.



Photos by Saul Martinez/for The Washington Post  
From left, Ashley, Felicia, Bobby, Abby, Karen and Dave Wilson at their home that is being built in Mallory Park at Lakewood Ranch, Florida. "We wanted a place with plenty of private space for [his mom, Karen] in Florida, so we chose a house with a multigen suite with a living area, bedroom and bathroom," Dave says.

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