

Senior Housing: The New Wish-List

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Each new generation of Seniors comes to the Senior Living Market with a very different and evolving set of desires and expectations. We are now seeing the second half of the Silent Generation as the dominant market customer for the Service-Enriched (Independent Living, Assisted Living) Market. This is a consumer whose ideals for retirement are more closely related to the Baby Boomers. *Maintaining their connections to the at-large community, a focus on health and wellness, less age segregation, diversified educational opportunities, more and newer technologies, are all on the wish-list.* So, what are some of the strategies for Senior Housing that we should be considering as designers and providers of these environments?

Maintaining Community Membership

The Site: Industry surveys show that each newer generation of older Americans have less desire to be segregated and more desire to maintain connections and involvement in the community at-large. I have observed that some of the best performing projects, and those that are able to attract a wider age group are those that are located in the mainstream of the community, whether it's suburban or urban. For example, we recently completed a project in Lone Tree that was strategically located in the heart of a Suburban Town Center. The site location affords residents immediate access to a variety of retail and restaurants, a Performing Art Center, a Library, Hospital and a host of other community amenities. This project is experiencing an extremely high pre-sale and lease-up performance from a more diversified age group. This is principally attributed to the fact that residents have numerous and ready options for community participation and all-age interaction.

The Building: Consistent with the new desires for community connectedness, Non-Dwelling Amenity Spaces within the building should be designed to be versatile and flexible enough to accommodate a variety of functions that could include the community at-large. We should be thinking about establishing the Senior Living Environment as a community destination. While hosting community activities is a change in the way we traditionally operate Senior Housing, providing these flexible spaces will allow operators to adapt to changing demands and preferences of newer and coming generations.

Fitness, Health and the Outdoors

Architecture is a powerful tool in setting expectations. Large, well-appointed, Fitness Centers are associated with health, fitness and vitality. Surveys show that prospective residents rank Fitness Centers among their top priorities when considering a Senior Living Community. Placing these functions in prominent locations within the development, and creating an all-age non-senior image, along with the inclusion of holistic Health and Spa services, is an important strategy that aligns with evolving lifestyle preferences in America.

Evidence-based design studies prove that daylight and access to the outdoors offers significant benefits to overall health and well-being. Also, we have evolved to a more outdoor lifestyle in America. This all points to the fact that responsive design should include consideration for improved outdoor spaces and opportunities in our built environments. Outdoor exercise areas, covered activity decks, outdoor lounges and dining areas, fire pits and extensive walking paths

are all successful design practices that are proven to be responsive to today's newer generation of residents.

Less Age Segregation

As we provide for the current market, and prepare for the coming Baby Boomer Generation, we should be considering the "Apartment for Life" concept that allows residents to age-in-place. These could be in intergenerational developments or age-restricted buildings that are strategically situated in community mainstream locations. A variety of a-la-carte health and convenience services are delivered to the residents in their home. While all this directly relates to new generation preferences, it also closely aligns with new and coming Healthcare Policy which promises to continue to direct funding toward outpatient health services.

Another consideration that supports this concept for the next generation is that lack of financial resources among the boomers. Residing in market-rate apartments, or staying at home and accessing health care and concierge services from the community, is often a less expensive alternative.

Technology

The new Senior is tech savvy and demands competent and current technologies to be made available to them. Access to the digital marketplace, social media, educational opportunities and concierge services are on the Technology Wish-List. Much like the goal to be responsive in the programming and design of our buildings, we must be positioned for digital responsiveness.

Conclusion

As Architects, we learn early on that the best buildings are those that are most *Responsive* to the needs, desires, and expectations of its occupants and users. This is especially true in designing for Seniors. Understanding the Wish-Lists for new and coming generations of Seniors, and providing fresh and innovative design responses, should be our goals. It is the dynamic of Consumerism we must focus on, and it's not a static exercise, it requires understanding, innovation and ambition for us to continue to provide successful and thriving environments.