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## Sailing into the future

*The next generation of senior communities will have more amenities than a cruise ship*

**D**ay spas. Aquatic centers. Cyber learning labs. Activity hubs. Green roofs. College courses. Themed restaurants. Wellness gardens. Smart home technology.

Not exactly what you'd expect to find at a continuing care retirement community? Welcome to the future, says Linda Hollinger-Smith of Mather Life-Ways Institute on Aging.

A recent survey of 435 senior living communities in 13 states found these trends and more.

"It will not be business as usual in the years ahead," Hollinger-Smith says. And its not just about window dressing. A sincere desire to increase resident independence, wellness and environmental friendliness is steering the ship.

This sea change is part of a generational shift in the senior population. The so-called "silent generation"—those born between 1924 and 1942—is the next group moving in, before the Baby Boom generation, Hollinger-Smith says. "The total number of individuals is much lower than the GI generation. Senior living organizations will need to identify their niche to stand out from other communities."

Chicago has a lot of marketplace leaders in senior living that are already riding the wave.

At The Mather, a luxurious

building slated to open in downtown Evanston in October, even the advertising is different. Sara McVey, vice president and experience director, says the company aimed to set a different tone with an edgy marketing campaign.

"Instead of mellow, smiling seniors we started with a

spokesperson who was a retired creative director and copywriter. He's sitting in a chair with purple socks on and no shoes. He calls himself a "writer, sailor, water colorist and footwear avoidist," McVey says.

Some of the taglines in the campaign included: "Let's be green without envy" (referring to The Mather's 3.5 acres of garden space); "Let's eat like kings" (seven themed restaurants on site); "Let's keep our heart wrinkle-free" (10,000 square-foot fitness center and day spa, with an indoor pool).

Like at most CCRC's, residents pay a fee to move into The Mather, but they don't own their apartment. (The Mather requires \$350,000-\$1 million up front, depending on the size of the unit.) Ninety percent is refunded to the resident or their estate if they leave or die. Residents also pay a monthly fee that varies depending on the care plan they choose, and whether they're in an independent living or assisted living

unit. Like a cruise ship, it's an all-inclusive lifestyle with food, housekeeping, maintenance, activities, and some utilities included.

The Mather's urban location will integrate residents into the community, McVey says. "It won't be just a place where old people live. It will be a place where people are doing things that working people wish they could do."

### Living in the future

Bill and Betty Boyd of Northbrook, the quintessential future residents of The Mather, bear this out. Both are in their early 70s and healthy. They decided to move into a senior community before they really needed to, in order to take advantage of all The Mather has to offer.

"We wanted to make the decision ourselves, and not put the burden on our two sons later on," Betty Boyd says. "We are planners, and have no trouble living in the future. That helps us be optimistic and excited for this move."

The Boyds say The Mather's proximity to Northwestern University, Lake Michigan, the El, the public library, and all the shopping, dining and entertainment in the heart of Evanston will open up new vistas.

"It's important for us not to be in isolation in suburbia," Bill Boyd says. "We wanted to enjoy an urban environment, which we never have had. It's exciting for us to think that we can just walk downtown to everything."

The North Shore couple had active careers in education for many years, then ran a travel business leading European tours. And they have no intention of slowing down. Betty is looking forward to using the spa and exercise facilities three times a week, and Bill plans to buy a bicycle after they move in. They've already gotten busy organizing day trips for fellow future residents, and have gotten involved with Northwestern University.

"We're in good health now,



Residents at The Mather participate in an exercise class — one of the many amenities residents have come to expect at senior living properties.

but it's comforting to know that everything we might need is in the building," Betty Boyd says.

**Smith Senior Living, located in Beverly, takes a similar tack.**

**"Overall, our philosophy is a holistic approach for all aspects of living," says Mike Flynn, CEO. At the newly redeveloped Smith Village campus, mind and body are given lots to do. Smith Village also maximizes its proximity to nearby Saint Xavier University, where residents frequent classes and cultural events. Back at home, Smith Village's computer lab fosters lifelong learning. "High school volunteers come in and teach residents how to use computers if they don't know how, but it's amazing how many already do," Flynn says.**

**Smith Village's health club program, Senior Fit, enjoys a whopping 85 percent participation rate. "This allows them to get around more freely for a longer period of time," Flynn says. "It really works."**

### Incorporating green, smart tech

Further out on the horizon, an upscale CCRC at 850 Lake Shore Drive is set to open in 2012. By then, the former Lake Shore Athletic Club building will have been gutted and refitted from stem to stern, while maintaining the historic Beaux Arts façade and two 1920s interior rooms.

This adaptive reuse is about as green as you can get, says Matt Phillips, president of Integrated Development Group

LLC. The building is going for silver LEED certification, a high environmental standard.

Smart home technology will be the norm by then, Phillips says. All the units will have wireless Internet access, and they will be hard-wired into the building's information system.

"Residents will have touch pads to contact others outside their unit if they need help, or they can wear a wristband or pendant. This is more user friendly than the old pull cord systems," Phillips explains. The building will also feature a wireless entry system with fobs similar to those that unlock car doors. "They tend to be easier than traditional keys," Phillips says.

The common space was cleverly designed to bring people together. "About half the space on the first floor—10,000 square feet—will be a wellness center/lounge. This will be an interconnected area containing a large aerobics room, fitness room, spa, and movie theater that seats 60," Phillips says. "Having them adjacent makes a hub of activity, because it's the liveliness and activity of the residents that makes these places really special."

The dining room will have classic touches of yesteryear, such as restored light fixtures. It's large enough to seat 180, so residents can dine on a reservation system, and not be limited to two seatings.

"The more we can satisfy our residents, the better off we'll be," Phillips says. ■

