

# Chicago Tribune

November 10, 2010 | Section 7 | STYLE

## Walking the Talk

### Walkable communities are a step ahead

**A**sk any senior, and they'll tell you retirement is no time to put your feet up. Experts have been telling us for years that walking is the best route to physical, emotional and social health. (Your feet should be meeting pavement at least 30 minutes a day for moderate activity, according to the Surgeon General.) The Centers for Disease Control says a shift from auto trips to walking and biking is the No. 1 strategy to reduce diseases related to inactivity, such as heart disease, diabetes, and some types of cancer. There is even new evidence that seniors can preserve the size of their brain and their memory into old age by walking regularly at least six miles per week, says the National Institute on Aging.

#### Residents agree

"There are days that I wonder if I'm up to anything. But if I can get my body moving and get up and do a mile, I feel so much better," says Dorothy Hartemayer, resident of Chestnut Square, a 55 and older community in Glenview.

Open for seven years now, Chestnut Square is part of a planned community called The Glen, which features homes, shopping, restaurants, entertainment, a school, park facilities and a Metra station. "The idea was to incorporate our building to that environment, so residents could travel short distances," says David Shamrock, director of program services at Chestnut Square. "The major-

ity of our residents are walking. They are very vital seniors."

#### Suburban downtowns

Several new senior communities are also walking the talk around Chicagoland. They have chosen locations in urban and suburban downtowns that emphasize walkability.

"The Chicago area is known for its lively neighborhoods and downtowns, so it's no surprise that seniors want to be a part of that," says Linda Kunicki, marketing director at Elmhurst Pointe and LaGrange Pointe, two suburban CCRCs (continuing care retirement communities). "We realized that seniors desire high density, transit-oriented developments near essential services and attractive community places," she says. "By locating our communities in the heart of downtown Elmhurst and La Grange, we have created an environment where seniors can thrive. They do not need to rely on a car to get around."

Karen Kuntz, a new resident at Elmhurst Pointe, says she looked for years before finding what she wanted in retirement living. "I knew immediately the country wasn't for me," she says. "You're too dependent on the bus or the car, and you can't do anything on your own, walk to anywhere if you wanted to."

As soon as she experienced Elmhurst and Elmhurst Pointe, "I knew that I had found a home," she says.

The Mather is another pacesetter in suburban downtown living. It's a

luxury CCRC that opened last year two blocks from the Northwestern University campus, Lake Michigan and downtown Evanston.

"We think the location should be a key consideration for people considering a move, not only for walking health but also proximity to universities, theaters, stores, restaurants, entertainment, transportation, etc.," says Mary Leary, CEO of The Mather. "We are thinking of adding to our concierge staff because people are out and about so much around town."

#### City life

Downtown Chicago is also experiencing more senior foot traffic.

The Clare is a state-of-the-art high rise CCRC that opened in 2008 at the corner of Pearson and Rush streets near the Water Tower. Its futuristic architecture and classy lifestyle have gotten rave reviews ever since. Its residents tend to be super-engaged in city life.

For example, at age 81 Judge William Hart walks to court every day in the Dirksen Federal Building. He used to commute from Aurora.

"This is the first time [a senior retirement community] like this has been located in the heart of the city," Hart says. "I think it's a good thing because I think people should mix with other people. I like to hear different languages spoken, and experience different ways of life, which are not apparent in the suburbs."

When not working, walking or volunteering, Hart bikes and takes exercise classes, as does his wife, Kay. "My theory is that you should remain active as long as you can," he says.

Joanne Celweycz, another resident of The Clare, is an avid skier. Celweycz, 72, and her husband, still head to Utah every winter. "We're outdoor people," she says.

Where do they go in the neighborhood? "We walk to the stores, Bed, Bath & Beyond, and the grocery stores. We walk to Navy Pier, to the opera simulcasts, the Jewel on Division, and Millennium Park. Sometimes I'll take a bus to Lincoln Park Zoo and walk back."

Celweycz says she wasn't planning to retire downtown, because she thought her outdoorsy lifestyle would cease.



Elmhurst Pointe residents Jerry Farenga and Karen Kuntz enjoy the community's proximity to downtown Elmhurst and its urban amenities.

"We were thinking of a place to move to, and my husband said he wanted to go back to being a city boy," she says. "We investigated other places in the area, and I can't imagine being anywhere but here. We just love it. I thought I would miss the forest preserve and the trees changing, but I just love all the pocket parks."

Another notable city spot for seniors is the North Center Senior campus, at Irving Park Road and Western Avenue. This year it won a national award for livable communities from AARP and the National Association of Home Builders.

The award recognized the campus for being a true community with different housing options plus "features that improve everyday comfort, safety and personal independence for residents including transportation, walkability, accessibility, safety, shopping, housing, health and recreation."

That means seniors don't have to go far to visit a park or go to the doctor — they're right outside their door. Just across the street are drugstores, coffee shops, a super-market and bus lines.

"The North Center Campus absolutely embodies what is important when assessing whether or not a community is livable," says Elinor Ginzler, senior vice president for livable communities at AARP. "The community has features that promote successful aging."

#### Ditching the car

It's no surprise that these walkable communities report that residents are bringing fewer cars than expected, or selling their cars after they've lived there a while.

"They are deciding that they don't need to bring two cars, or they don't need a car at all. They say they can walk to the train station, or anywhere else," says Leary of The Mather residents.

Celweycz and her husband got rid of their car after moving to The Clare. Hart says he hardly uses his. Hartemayer, who is in her 80s, still drives around Glenview, but doesn't worry about needing to do it forever. "That's one of the reasons my son picked this place," she says. "He said to me, 'When you're no longer driving you'll be able to walk.'"



Chestnut Square in Glenview is part of The Glen, which features homes, shopping, restaurants, entertainment and a Metra station.