

time Prime

INSIDE Primetime



Generation generous?

We asked folks if they gave more or less help to their adult children than their parents gave them. Find out what they said.

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It's a **brave new WORD**

THEN = **NOW**

RETIREMENT = **REPRIORMENT**

THEN = **NOW**

ACTIVITIES = **RECREATIONAL PROGRAMS**

THEN = **NOW**

PATIENT = **RESIDENT**

THEN = **NOW**

BEAUTY/BARBER SHOP = **SALON/SPA**

THEN = **NOW**

BUS/VAN/TRANSPORT = **COACH**

Changing the language of retirement

Senior? forget it. Old folk's home? What's that? The so-called retirement world is speaking a new language when it comes to housing and lifestyle. Activities are now called recreational programs; craft rooms are creative arts studios. A bus or van is a coach, a beauty shop a salon or spa. Dining takes place in restaurants, cafés or bistros. A resident is never called a patient. A unit is a home or suite, and most important, a senior citizen is simply a person.

Does rewriting the dictionary change the reality?

Industry leaders say the way we label people, places and things has a powerful effect on how we think and act. It also informs the communities we build.

Sara McVey, vice president and experience director at Mather Lifeways, says they've been actively trying to change the conversation via cultural change inside and outside the company. Mather is known for its innovative approach to serving older adults and offering state-of-the-art living. It sidestepped the dictionary a few years ago with its "repriorment" campaign.

Taking the "tire" out of retirement

Repriorment upends the traditional definition of retire, which essentially means "to withdraw," she explains. Repriorment is a state of mind versus a state of employment. It means reprioritizing and discovering the joy of new directions, rethinking your shelved but not forgotten priorities, passions, and dreams. It's something you want to do versus what you have to do.

Advertisements pictured older adults doing un-senior like things, such as going for a dip in Lake Michigan in an orange Speedo, and lounging around in purple socks.

The concept describes life at The Mather, a brand new upscale continuing care community in downtown Evanston. Resident Stewart Grill describes it as having the amenities, luxuries and services of a cruise ship on land. "You walk out the door and you see college kids," he says. "It's not like moving to Florida to vegetate."

The new language at The Mather resonated with Grill. "The concept of repriorment is marvelous because that's exactly what it is. I'll be

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photo illustration by Justin Goode
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75 next month. You don't like to think of yourself as a senior citizen."

Presbyterian Homes, which operates communities in Chicago and the suburbs, is on the same page. It even lobbied Merriam-Webster to change the definition of "retire" a few years back.

Resident Betty Taylor explains it this way: "The day my husband retired from corporate responsibilities I hired an airplane to fly over corporate headquarters with a banner imprinted: 'Hey, John -YIPPEE!' We embraced the new beginning. We hear new voices, we re-configure our days and ourselves."

Retiring words

Though Merriam-Webster didn't budge, Presbyterian Homes stands behind its slogan: "Retire nothing." It, too, uses eye-catching shots of older adults doing age-inappropriate things, like an ad that pictured three women racing down the road in a hot red vintage convertible. Even the company Web site is retirenothing.org.

Bill Loving, a resident of Presbyterian Homes' Lake Forest Place, agrees times have changed.

"In the last decade or so, the older population has become more of a contributing force," he says. "People pay attention to us. It's not bad to be old anymore."

Presbyterian Homes Vice President of Sales and Marketing Bob Werdan says all this is more than just sales and marketing.

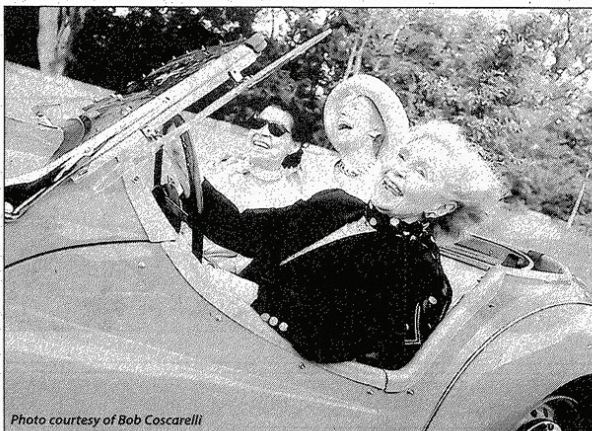


Photo courtesy of Bob Coscarelli

An ad campaign for Presbyterian Homes uses photos of older adults doing fun things not typically associated with retirement and aging.

"The language we use is impactful, and words paint pictures," he says. "At one time we served the elderly in homes for the aged and infirm. Communities don't fit that description anymore. To perpetuate the myth by using that language is unfortunate. Once you understand that and don't change it, you're part of the problem."

Some words Presbyterian Homes has retired include: Alzheimer's unit (memory care); facility (community); admissions director (lifestyle counselor). "Who in their right mind wants to be admitted to a unit inside a facility?" Werdan says.

How, then, does the new lingo translate into better lives for residents?

"We have to demonstrate it," says McVey. "It needs to be an internal theme first, seamless and invisible." For example, staff at The Mather work in experience zones, not departments. Their job is to deliver experiences, not just services, and are empowered to do so. "Our mantra is 'Act like you own the place,' which goes from dish washers to directors," McVey says.

This attitude has already made an impression on Grill, who simply gushes about the professionalism and attention to detail he and his wife, Rochelle, have been shown while transitioning into The Mather. "I know I sound like a pitch-man, but I can't say

enough about them," he says.

New words, new possibilities

It makes sense that new words spark the curiosity of sophisticated people who already have lived a full life and aren't done yet.

"When your multipurpose room is called Possibilities, it changes the conversation of the category," McVey says. "We want people to say, 'What is that?' It's intrigue laced with an element of confusion and entertainment, which is healthy."

Presbyterian Homes' Lake Forest Place resembles a country club, not a bridge club. It's a continuing care community of private homes and apartments with resort-quality amenities, common areas and dining.

Even the nursing care areas are designed on a residential, rather than a medical model, Werdan says. "Nursing stations are workspaces out of the way, hallways are carpeted, everything has fabric, not vinyl, and there is no overhead paging system. We tell our staff their job is not simply task-centered. They should make residents feel unique and interested."

Werdan adds that innovation is not just a perk for the wealthy. Presbyterian Homes has two subsidized independent living communities for low-income adults in Lakeview and one in West Rogers Park.

"Most of the changes we're talking about don't cost money," he says. "The improved language and person-centered care can cross socioeconomic boundaries."

Who said senior?

Why is change important now? Because the older adult population is changing. The oldest Baby Boomers, now in their early 60s, naturally speak a different language.

Pulte Homes knows all about them. At its Del Webb communities (independent living for those 55 and better), it's all about the language of the active lifestyle.

"When people come to a Del Webb, they are amazed at how much activity is going on, like kayaking, softball, volleyball, hiking and fishing," says Steve Atchison of Pulte Homes.

There are four resort-style Del Webb communities in the Chicago area alone, designed to be affordable for middle-class couples. (Interested? You can take a Vacation Getaway there for free—their term for a short stay in the community.)

Each place has a lifestyle director whose job it is to facilitate activities residents want. Resident "ambassadors" invite newcomers over for dinner to orient them into the social whirl.

"It works, because I've had people tell me they've been friends with people they never would have known in their [previous] social life," Atchison says. "You see a lot of social barriers begin to break down."

The language of social media is also spoken at Del Webb. "Communicating via e-mail to active adults was unheard of even five years ago," he says. "Now we Tweet and use Facebook and blogs. But you'll never hear us use the word senior." ■