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Primetime

A monthly look at local lifestyle news for those over 50

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New home sweet home

Making the move to a retirement community: Residents tell their stories

Retirement communities vary widely, from apartment buildings with a few services to assisted living facilities that provide round-the-clock help. To find out what it's actually like to live in different types of communities, we asked several seniors about their experience.

Pete and Jean Henderson, both 82, live in Evanston at the Mather. It's a continuing care retirement community that offers independent living as well as assisted and nursing care. The complex also provides meals and activities.

Q: How long have you lived at the Mather?

A: (Pete) We've lived here since January 2012.

Q: How big is your apartment?

A: (Jean) We have a two-bedroom unit with 1,350 square feet. It's quite spacious. But it's less than half the square footage of the house we had before we moved here.

Q: Where did you live before?

A: (Pete) We lived in a house in Winnetka.

Q: What did you do before retirement?

A: (Pete) I was an associate dean at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management, and I also worked as a business consultant.

A: (Jean) I worked briefly as a school teacher, but spent most of my time raising our seven children.

Q: Why did you move?

A: (Pete) As we got closer to age 80, we recognized that we might need more help in the years ahead. We've had the experience of caring for older relatives and we didn't want our children to have to do that for us. We decided on a continuing care community because we could get 24-hour care if we needed it.

A: (Jean) We picked the Mather because of the location in downtown Evanston. We can walk to restaurants, shops, Northwestern University, the trains and Lake Michigan. It's an absolutely perfect location.

Q: What else do you like about the Mather?

A: (Jean) There's so much to do here. I love the pool and doing water aerobics.



Pete and Jean Henderson

There are wonderful classes in the gym. That's where Pete usually is.

Q: What surprised you about the community?

A: (Pete) When we picked the Mather, we thought it was all about location, location, location. But it's really all about people, people, people. There's a remarkable spirit here. People are upbeat and enthusiastic.

A: (Jean) There's so much joy in the community. I didn't expect to have the pleasure of being a part of this group of remarkable and active people.

Q: Any advice?

A: (Pete) Don't wait too long. We're glad we made the move when we could still deal with downsizing. It's been a wonderful adventure.

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Dr. Herbert Lerner, 89, lives at Belmont Village of Oak Park, an assisted living and memory care building in the western suburb. Residents have their own apartments, but receive meals and help with activities of daily living.

Q: How long have you lived at Belmont Village?
A: Since last October.

Q: What kind of apartment do you have?
A: A studio apartment.

Q: What did you do before you retired?
A: I was a pediatrician in

Hyde Park and Chicago for 52 years. I was in practice with my wife, Ruth, who was also a pediatrician. We lived in the Kenwood neighborhood for 46 years.

Q: Why did you move to Belmont Village?
A: Actually, I lived here before for about 18 months with my wife, Ruth. She had dementia and Belmont offers memory care. Before she passed away, we moved in with our son for a while. I moved back here after she was gone because my son and his family work and weren't home very much.

Q: Do you need a lot of assistance?
A: No, I'm still pretty independent.

Q: What do you like about Belmont Village?
A: The food is excellent and the activities are very good. We go on trips to museums and to the movies. A van will take us anywhere within a 10-mile radius. I like the yoga and tai chi classes. I'm also taking cello lessons. I played in high school but had not played in 70 years, and I decided to try it again. I play "Happy Birthday" and other songs for the staff and residents on their birthdays.

Q: Any other comments?
A: I liked Belmont the first time I was here, and I like it now. There are a lot of new people here, but some old-timers from the first time I was here too. We're all friends.



Herbert Lerner, a former pediatrician, enjoys the food, the activities and the friendship at Belmont Village in Oak Park. He moved in last October and is now taking cello lessons.



Sally and Ron Kinnaman added a bright blue spruce color to some of their walls. "We added the color because this move is an adventure for us," Sally says.

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my own," she says. "I'm enjoying being able to make my own decisions — especially with decorating. It perks you up."

Say it with color

Ron and Sally Kinnaman, both 75, were some of the first residents to move into The Clare in Chicago four years ago. They had done the heavy lifting of downsizing 19 years ago when they first moved to Lincoln Park from California.

The three-bedroom apartment they took in the upscale senior residence is actually larger than their previous apartment. With more space, they added to their furnishings of family pieces and items they've accumulated through the years — some at garage sales — but still maintained their eclectic style, which Sally describes as "mish mosh."

The major change for the couple was the use of color. They painted many of the walls a bold blue spruce and also picked up the color in fabric and floor coverings.

"We added the color because this move is an adventure for us," says Sally. "It's a change, and we look at change as being an adventure. We embrace change."

The couple opens their home to entertain friends and also for prospective residents. "People tell us that the apartment is warm and vi-

brant," Sally adds.

Interior decorator Tom Ferguson of Tom Ferguson Interiors in Chicago has assisted Clare residents with their decorating.

"What I find is that since they're downsizing, they're often wanting to bring their favorite pieces along with them to their new home," he says. "They may want to update and change elements like colors, but often they want to hold onto what's comfortable to them. It makes their new place feel like their home, which is where most of them raised their families."

As in the case of the Kinnamans, Ferguson says he is seeing a lot more vibrant colors. "Vibrant colors are cheery and make people happy," he adds.

King says she sees people deciding to treat themselves to color in the form of colorful furniture and artwork. "They move away from completely neutral palettes," she adds.

Make a list

Whether moving to a larger or a smaller space, Ferguson recommends people go through their homes carefully and choose only their favorite pieces.

"I then suggest that they make a list, including their favorite colors or patterns and see how everything can be incorporated into their new space," he says. "Especially when downsizing, it's important to have a nice

flow in their unit. You want the color scheme that you choose to work nicely from room to room."

A favorite piece can achieve a new look by re-upholstering. "This makes it look fresh and new," says Ferguson. "New can be an old sofa with a new fabric on it to give it a new look."

King offers some practical advice.

"Remember that less ornate furniture is easier on the eyes in a smaller space," she says.

She suggests taking stock of storage and finding ways to conceal clutter. "Credenzas and hutches with solid cabinet doors are great for accessible storage," she says. "Beds with drawers under the mattress make use of otherwise wasted floor space for storage."

King recommends going with glass end tables and dining tables since they appear to occupy less space "and allow light to flow nicely through less expansive spaces," she adds.

Scale is everything, says Ferguson. "Especially if you're moving to a smaller space, make sure the scale of furniture doesn't overwhelm it. Other important elements are organization and lighting."

Whether furniture is old or new, all items must be of proper dimensions, agrees King. "Always measure and compare furniture with floor plan dimensions," she says. ■



Retia McCord works downtown and appreciates the fact her affordable senior apartment building is located conveniently near her job at Wendella Boat Tours.

Retia McCord, 71, lives at Senior Suites of Central Station, an affordable apartment building in Chicago's South Loop. Building residents live independently, but some services are available.

Q: How long have you lived at Senior Suites?
A: For almost six years.

Q: What kind of apartment do you have?
A: I have a one-bedroom apartment.

Q: Where did you live before?
A: In a big apartment building in the city, farther south.

Q: Why did you move?
A: I work downtown for Wendella Boat Tours, taking tickets and handing out information to tourists. I'd see the Senior Suites building on my way to work and thought it looked nice. I liked the fact that it wasn't as big as the building I was living in at the time, and the Senior Suites building was closer to my job. I also wanted to move to a building only for seniors.

Q: What do you like about the Senior Suites building?
A: This is my home. I've made many friends in the building. We get together and keep in touch. We help each other when someone is

sick. We share dinners and sit together and talk in the lounge. There are lots of building activities, such as Bingo and card games. Someone even comes in on certain days to do our nails. It's real convenient.

Q: What surprised you about the building?
A: I was surprised the building staff was so helpful. That includes the people in the office, the housekeepers, and the repairmen. If something is wrong, they come right up and fix it. I was also delightfully surprised that there was a washer and dryer on my floor, and it's free. ■

Primetime EXTRA

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For advertising opportunities in this section please contact **Jim Rotche** at Jrotche@tribune.com.

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