Sustainable Building Demand for Retirees is Green and Growing

As the "Boomers" explore housing options in retirement, one of the key features being considered is environmental sustainability for a healthier environment overall. Some of these individuals were among the first to celebrate Earth Day, so when it comes to choosing where they want to spend their days in retirement, they have not left their Birkenstocks at the door. Being "green" is among the features that are trending in new design and construction, because they are in high demand.

AARP's Sustainability Manager, Pam Evans, recently stated that, according to the American Lung Association, nearly half of all Americans still live in areas with unhealthy levels of smog, which lead to more upper respiratory illness. As health concerns increase, so too do the expectations imposed on healthcare and senior living communities, where a healthy environment is in demand.

Mather LifeWays newest continuing care retirement community, The Mather, in Evanston, Illinois, put sustainability on the map for this demographic when it recently earned Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Gold certification from the U.S. Green Building Council, which establishes criteria for the construction of sustainable buildings.

In addition to providing a healthier, healing environment, LEED-certified buildings are designed to lower operating costs and increase asset value; reduce waste sent to landfills, conserve energy and water; and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Through numerous design and building criteria, The Mather was able to reduce toxins and provide a healthier environment both for residents and the community at large, all while managing to lower energy bills, reduce waste, and achieve healthier indoor air quality.

"We undertake responsible, sustainable designs that have a minimum environmental impact for the well-being of Evanston residents as well as residents of The Mather," said Joe Zajdel, vice president of business development for The Mather.

Specifically, the project kept sustainability in mind when using native and adaptive landscaping to reduce irrigation needs, rainwater for irrigation, and reflective roofing materials and a green roof to reduce the urban heat island effect. Nearly two-thirds of The Mather site is dedicated to green space, with a garden built above an underground parking structure as well.

Indoors, the incorporation of low-flow fixtures reduces potable water consumption and energy efficient lighting and mechanical systems reduce electrical consumption.

High efficiency filters control indoor pollutants, which help to achieve healthier indoor air quality. Also contributing to healthier indoor air are the low amounts of volatile organic compounds (VOC) in adhesives, sealants, painting and coatings, which were used during construction. More than 20% of the building materials were supplied by local and regional vendors and more than 84% of the building materials from demolition were recycled.

Additionally, ready access to culture, shopping and public transportations plays a big role in the green movement with the real-estate rule of "location, location, location" driving the pedestrian push. Avoiding "sprawl" is consistent with principles of environmental sustainability, and its central location to the very walkable Evanston community is key.

A healthy living environment is one of the keys to aging well, and Mather LifeWays innovative approach to sustainability in construction is award-winning in concept and practice. Managing costs, improving air quality, reducing toxins and providing a healthy environment are among the many benefits.