

prime time

(special advertising section)

Retirement living tailor-made:

Today's variety of living options make it easy to find your ideal home.

By Linda Gebroe

Suzanne Leib knew her father would be surprised when she took him to see retirement communities. Leib, a geriatric care manager, says reactions like her father's are not uncommon.

"People are surprised that there's so much going on and at how beautiful these facilities are," says Leib. "Often, senior citizens and their families expect retirement homes to be full of little old ladies in wheel chairs. Instead, they find active communities with beautiful surroundings, delicious meals, and friendly, accommodating staff."

There are hundreds of retirement communities—in urban, suburban and rural settings—throughout the San Francisco Bay Area, providing different kinds of services. Some cater to active people; others focus on comprehensive medical care. At continuing-care communities for example, residents move in when they are in relatively good health, and the facility provides health care and other services through the residents' declining years and for the rest of their lives.

ENJOYING THE BENEFITS

Trish and John Hooper made the choice to move to a retirement community because they didn't want to be a burden to their children. Both had been through difficult times with their aging parents, and decided to move while they were still young enough to enjoy the many benefits of retirement community living.

"We have 52 activity committees here!" declares Trish. "They range from dominoes to bridge to flower arranging, as well as Spanish and French classes. There is also a gym, a pool, and bowling and putting greens."

The Hoopers, who are both hikers and gardeners, knew they wanted to move to a rural environment. They feel they made the right choice with the Sequoias-Portola Valley, where they were able to put in a small garden. With the facility being adjacent to the Windy Hill Open Space Preserve and miles of unspoiled hiking trails, the Hoopers can do all the hiking they want.



On the other hand, Hope Streeter wanted to be near her only child when she retired. So the lifelong East Coast resident pulled up stakes and moved to San Francisco, where her daughter owns a flower shop.

She says getting used to life at San Francisco Towers was easy after the first few days. "I'd moved many places with my husband without knowing anybody," Streeter says. "My mother used to say it got harder with age. It does . . . My first morning here two years ago, I didn't know a soul, and I ended up going to the dining room alone. But everyone was very friendly. They really want to know you here."

Now Streeter has large group of good friends with whom she participates in different activities.

"Between eating and activities, you hardly have time to do anything else!" says Streeter. "I try to get out every day and walk. I also run a bridge club, and four of us are in charge of renting Friday night movies."

Best of all, Streeter says, her family knows she's safe and her health needs are cared for. "The health department here is fabulous," she says. "You press or pull some device in your apartment, and someone's there in the blink of an eye."

MAKING YOUR SELECTION

While there is no set formula for selecting a retirement community, it helps for family or friends come together to discuss the situation.

"The first thing to consider is location. Is it better for people to stay in the community they're currently living in? Or is it better to consider a move closer to family?" Leib says. "Consider medical resources, too. How important is it to stay with the same doctor they've been seeing for years? Would a transition to the retirement community's medical system work?"

Leib also encourages people not to wait too long before making the decision. "Don't wait until someone's health is frail. You want to be able to have him or her make a good adjustment to the retirement community."

For Raymonde Kaplan, moving to Villa Marin while she was still relatively young was the right choice. At 72, Kaplan particularly enjoys the exercise facilities. "I wouldn't take my car to a gym, but I like to exercise here," she says.

Kaplan, a former teacher, enjoys being in San Rafael. She is active in Alliance Francaise, is a volunteer at the Marin Jewish Community Center, and is a frequent theatergoer.

"I first saw this place when I was helping a friend of mine look for retirement living communities," she explains. "A few months later, I was visiting my children in Mill Valley and suggested we stop in. I saw an apartment I liked and thought, 'Why wait another five or ten years?' At home, it was getting difficult to keep up with the cleaning and gardening."

Kaplan says she enjoys the social life and being around so many educated, interesting people.

"When you're older and single, your social life can shrink. My social life here is large," she says.

And, she adds, she's glad that she has a home for the rest of her life. "People who moved here when they were older than I am tell me I made the right decision coming earlier. When you're older, you're more attached to your home, and it gets harder to move," Kaplan says.

Similarly, Bea and Mark Brown, who live at the Tamalpais in Marin County, made the move for their children. One son lives in San Jose, the other in Boulder, Colorado. It would be difficult for either of them to get to Marin in a hurry if they had to.

"Our boys know we're secure for the rest of our lives," says Bea Brown. "They're glad we have the health benefits here."

Mark Brown says the life care aspect of the Tamalpais was important to Bea and him. "We are medically covered for the rest of our lives, with very few exceptions. We get three excellent meals a day."

In fact, the Browns were living at the high-rise Tamalpais just a day and a half, when Bea had a heart attack.

"The nurses were here in an instant," explains Mark, "and Bea was quickly transported to the hospital. If we'd still been living in Los Altos, we wouldn't have been able to get a nurse so quickly."

Bea says it's great to have a health center nearby, even just for colds.


"They're there for whatever level of care you need," she says.

The Browns also enjoy the integration of the Tamalpais with the greater community. There are frequent visits and talks given by local politicians and community leaders. And Bea is able to maintain her commitment to volunteerism, teaching pronunciation to Vietnamese adults at the San Rafael Canal Ministry.

"We're not isolated here," adds Mark. "We're part of a very busy community."

"You can be very active, or you can just relax and enjoy life here," echoes Hooper. "Of course, it helps to have three huge buffet tables in the dining room."

"When I talk to people who want to know what it's like living in a retirement community, I tell them this: It's like being they've been upgraded to first class on a cruise ship and you don't need the Dramamine."



Before you begin your search for a retirement community for yourself or for someone in your family, it pays to know what your options are. Keep in mind that some communities offer combined services—assisted living and independent retirement living, for example. Be sure to ask about the full range of services when you call.

ACTIVE ADULT COMMUNITY

These communities emphasize active lifestyles and social opportunities. They do not generally offer on-site medical providers, but some are located near healthcare providers. Examples of active-adult communities in the Bay Area include Los Altos Parc Regent, Los Altos; Rossmoor, Walnut Creek; and Oakmont Village, Santa Rosa.

INDEPENDENT RETIREMENT LIVING

Housing only residents who are ambulatory, these communities emphasize independent living, with social and recreational activities. They provide housekeeping, transportation, and other amenities. Examples of independent retirement living communities include The Broadmoor, San Francisco; The Atrium, San Jose; Smith Ranch Homes, San Rafael; and Byron Park, Walnut Creek.

ASSISTED LIVING

These licensed communities provide nonmedical help for daily activities such as bathing, dressing and taking medications. Examples of assisted living communities in the Bay Area include Rhoda Goldman Plaza, San Francisco; Greenhills Retirement Center, Millbrae; and Deer Park, Novato.

CONTINUING CARE

These facilities offer many independent living housing options, along with any needed medical and nursing services. At life-care communities, residents contract to receive full medical coverage for the rest of their lives. Continuing care communities in the Bay Area include the Peninsula Regent, San Mateo; and Piedmont Gardens, Oakland. Life-care communities include St. Paul's Towers, Oakland; Los Gatos Meadows, Los Gatos; and Spring Lake Village, Santa Rosa.

SKILLED NURSING

These facilities provide 24-hour nursing care. They also offer medical services and supervision by license nurses. Each center must be licensed by the California Department of Health. Examples of skilled nursing facilities in the Bay Area include The Reutlinger Community for Jewish Living, Danville; Friends House, Santa Rosa; and Hillside Manor, San Mateo.

IN-HOME CARE

For elderly people who prefer to stay in their own homes or apartments, in-home healthcare is a practical option. In-home care ranges from fairly sophisticated—similar to what a patient would get in a hospital—to simple help with everyday activities such as cooking and cleaning. Some in-home care agencies in the Bay Area are Accent Care, Walnut Creek; Baker Anders Christie, Inc., San Francisco; Older Adults Care Management, Palo Alto; and Caregivers Network, San Rafael.

For more information about the different options for retirement living, visit www.newlifestyles.com