

Marco Island's first assisted living facility starts accepting applications: What to know

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A new theater, entertainment center, salon and spa, bar and dining experience venue with waterfront views is coming to Marco Island but not everyone will be able to partake. It will be part of Marco Island's first assisted living and memory care center.

In true Southwest Florida fashion, The Watermark at Marco Island on San Marco Road near Bald Eagle Drive promises to be an upscale and active community for those wishing to live there.

"Marco Island is just, you know, remarkably vital, how much spark, how much vitality is omnipresent in the seniors that live on this island," said Robyn Johnson, who is the executive director of the facility. "It's really fun, because it's a group of seniors who are not slowing down as they age."

Leasing is under way

The Watermark at Marco Island has started leasing and has reservations for half of the 86-unit potential total occupancy, Johnson said. The 20-unit memory care units are full in terms of reservations, she said. That leaves 66 units for assisted living and those are filling up too, she said.

Managed by Watermark Retirement Communities, the community will focus on "whole-person wellness" using its 360Well® well program that is rooted in four circles of wellness: mind, body, spirit, and community. What does that mean? It means delicious food and restaurants on site. It means a sports bar atmosphere on site. It means outdoor living with firepits, water views, a bar, entertainment and on-site activities. It means a salon and spa on site. It means doctors and medical testing come to the residents. It means transportation to Marco Island's famous crescent beach, to the library, to restaurants and museums, the Arts Center and more, Johnson said.

"There is such an enormous plethora of organized social and philanthropic (opportunities) on the island," Johnson said. With a wheelchair accessible bus and a vehicle with a driver, "we'll be able to provide access to the island for our residents anytime, and I think that that's really meaningful ... so that they don't feel like they're leaving something but they're just gaining even more access."

Amenities include a fitness center, wellness center, salon and spa, as well as waterfront dining and sunset views. The community's two dining venues will feature seasonal menus highlighting fresh, local ingredients and restaurant-style service.

Healthcare will come to residents

Along with the high-end amenities, The Watermark is still an assisted living and memory care center. And with that comes the senior care expected and then some, Johnson said.

Medical doctors including dermatology, podiatry and hospice services will be available on site, she said. Medical testing including bloodwork and radiology also will be done on site. Primary care doctors and preventative medicine will come to the residents, she said. Watermark is in talks to partner for primary care doctors, she said.

In addition, residents can work on their brains and coordination and keeping in touch with the community, Johnson said. They can take classes through Watermark University – everything from painting, yoga, languages and ballroom dancing to pottery and flower arranging.

Exclusive to Arizona-based Watermark Retirement Communities is the BrainCafé, a collaboration with the UCLA Longevity Center to provide a comprehensive memory training series to help residents.

The memory care center is for seniors living with Alzheimer's, dementia and other forms of memory loss. The Prema Memory Support program "integrates residents into the rhythms of daily living, while Gourmet Bites Cuisine allows residents who traditionally require assistance at mealtime to regain their independence and enjoy protein-packed, nutritionally balanced meals."

Who is the executive director and when will Watermark open?

Originally from Orono, Minnesota, Johnson is no stranger to Collier County. She began visiting the Naples area in 1974 with her parents, who started bringing the family down for six weeks every year.

As an adult, Johnson worked with NCH to help bring the Blue Zones Project well-being initiative to senior healthcare environments and moved to Naples full time in 2022. Most recently, she was executive director of Beach House assisted living in Naples.

"Because I have this unique background in innovative senior care that's really based on understanding how a body, mind, spirit approach, including high engagement, social opportunities, great cuisine, access to fantastic healthcare, but programming that really sparked fun and meaningful moments, when I read about Watermark and had an opportunity to see how advanced and how truly unique their approach to senior care is, I was simply excited about the opportunity to become part of their team and to open something in Marco," Johnson said.

Watermark's Marco Island facility is set to open in November or December, Johnson said.

A privately held company, Watermark manages more than 70 retirement communities in 22 states across the U.S.