

Senior living communities aim for homey atmosphere with amenities, services

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Custom cabinets and custom painting are part of the amenities offered at the Legacy at Clover Blossom. Deidre Klapka (right). Photo provided by Legacy at Clover Blossom

In his 20 years at the Jewish Home, Mike King, CEO, has been asked lots of questions about amenities and services at the various levels of care.

For example, he's had more than one conversation lately about EV charging stations for residents at the Jewish Home's Winton Road campus, The Summit at Brighton Independent Living.

At first, he was a bit surprised. "We're figuring out how we can set up our parking lots with our new expansion," King said of plans for the Summit.

But when he thought about it, the request made sense.

"That's the world we live in," said King, who has been CEO for nearly a decade. "People are staying healthier. They're coming into our organization, maybe a little bit older, but still really fully functioning."

Thanks to aging Baby Boomers, older people will make up an increasing share of the population, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. In many cases, these older Americans are maintaining their vitality. Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) show that older adults are healthier overall and living independently for longer, which means senior living communities aren't only responding to changing preferences of residents, but also anticipating their needs.

"Ownership cannot delay when it comes to updating or renovations," said Deidre Klapka, executive director at the independent living Legacy at Clover Blossom, where electric car charging stations are outside some of the villas. "They need to stay current and on trend. Our seniors are current and on trend."

Residents from independent living to skilled nursing facilities are looking for convenience, comfort and choice in their home. They want to be involved and stay active. Many want to build relationships, and all want to feel welcome.

“One of the reasons why people look toward a senior living community, whether it’s at the independent living level, the assisted living level or the skilled nursing level, is the socialization,” said Mike Perrotta, senior vice president of housing and executive director of Cloverwood and Linden Knoll, part of Friendly Senior Living. “Isolation is something that can affect everybody, and we know, disproportionately can affect older adults in our community.

“Whether they recognize it or not, that’s something that people will often find when they move in here that they were missing from their lives. We want the physical community and our programs to be able to support that.”

Perrotta gave the example of the dining room at Cloverwood. Residents had been complaining that it was so difficult to hear the people at their own table that some residents chose not to come. So, a renovation included changing the acoustics.

“The residents have been very, very pleased, and we’ve seen a lot more utilization in that space,” he said.

Friendly Senior Living is making it easier for residents in assisted and independent living to stay healthy by partnering with UR Geriatric Medical Group and by installing interactive health monitoring machines that can connect to telehealth. There also are an onsite lab and physical therapy services, in addition to a fitness center and classes.

“I think wellness is the biggest thing that consumers are looking for in the earlier stages of a continuum,” he said.

Senior communities use methods ranging from surveys to resident councils and town halls to informal chats with residents to learn what they’d like.

“They bring us ideas all the time,” said Klapka. “We’re constantly implementing, I would say on a monthly basis.”

When it comes to larger projects, such as the current \$100,000 pool renovation, Klapka works with Legacy at Clover Blossom’s parent company, Watermark Retirement Community, and such projects may take longer to implement.

Quicker turnarounds include implementing a seven-days-a-week schedule for the new bus, and updating programs on a regular basis.

Residents want the same choices they had before moving to a senior community, whether that’s deciding the color of their living room or what they like to eat.

“Custom paint is something we do all the time,” Klapka said. “They want it to feel like their own home. We do custom cabinetry, custom vanities, anything to make it feel like they don’t lose choices as they come into our community.”

Residents also seek convenience. “We’re looking to be able to offer caféstyle services and upgraded coffees because that’s what they’re looking for,” she said. “They want to feel like they’re going to a restaurant or a cafe or a diner. And we’re here to provide that experience for them.”

Senior living communities are adjusting to changing preferences across the continuum because, regardless of the level of care they need, residents are seeking a more homelike and less institutional setting.

“We’re unlike the hospital where it’s an episodic event where you’re in and out,” King said. “We’re taking care of people’s lives. Yes, we got to focus on quality of care, but just as important is quality of life.”

The Jewish Home completed a renovation of its tower, transitioning to having all rooms be private.

“A lot of nursing homes can’t do it because they might not have the capital,” King said. “But that was strategically what we wanted to do.”

He said the board of directors is committed to the residents and will take on projects that it believes benefits them.

After hearing from the community about a lack of options for middle-income seniors, the Jewish Home plans to build 90 apartments for residents aged 62 and older.

“What’s nice about it is that people have access to many of the services here on our campus,” King said. “But we’ll also be able to bring services to those who need it.”