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# How the Intergenerational Senior Living Trend is Evolving in 2024

By Austin Montgomery | August 26, 2024

For years, senior living operators have sought to create communities with organic connections among different generations. Doing so is harder than it looks.

For one, people belonging to different generations have different wants and needs. They also sometimes mingle in different spaces, or use the same spaces in a different way than one another. That [can sometimes create friction](#), even in well-planned projects.

Senior living companies and organizations have sought to foster better intergenerational ties through a variety of projects over the years, including university-based communities and projects built alongside adjacent multifamily communities. In 2024, novel ideas about intergenerational senior living are percolating and new concepts and models are being put to the test.

Lasell Village, a community located on the campus of Lasell University near Boston, is one example of how senior living operators are creating more intergenerational interactions through university living arrangements.

Like some other university-based communities Lasell Village requires residents to participate in on-campus activities and volunteerism. The community also employs students within its four walls, according to President Zehra Abid-Wood.



For some communities and projects – like at one life plan community in Dousman, Wisconsin, and in others from Watermark Retirement Communities – the process of creating more intergenerational interactions starts in more thoughtful design concepts. And for other operators behind intergenerational communities, like active adult operator and multifamily giant Greystar, creating such interactions is a “balance” that is ever-evolving.

The future of intergenerational living lies in creating shared visions among investor groups and higher education institutions, Abid-Wood said. Given the challenges of fewer high schoolers enrolling in colleges and universities than in years past, to communities struggling to adapt to today’s senior living customer profile, Abid-Wood sees opportunity for the senior living industry to bring intergenerational concepts to life in the future.

“Over the next three to five years, I think the [intergenerational] space is going to grow in the U.S.,” she said.

## **Senior living and multifamily together**

One of the challenges of intergenerational senior living is getting both residents of a community and members of the surrounding area to use the same spaces. A common approach is to design restaurants and other commercial spaces that serve both residents of communities and people living outside of them.

But that trend has evolved in 2024 to include co-locating senior living with buildings for all-ages multifamily residents.

Tucson, Arizona-based Watermark Retirement Communities took that approach in its newly opened first intergenerational community in Bellevue, Washington. In July, the community opened its independent living expansion.



The community – a partnership among Watermark and developer Alliance Residential – also includes a luxury multi-family building, Broadstone Savoie, which is currently open to move-ins for all ages and has 190 units.

The community includes a public-facing bistro and social areas such as activity and special event space. Watermark’s most recent development now spans an entire city block and includes multiple restaurants, wellness facilities and activity spaces with the additions

“Wherever possible, we want to get involved in projects that have those intergenerational opportunities, and there are amenity spaces that are going to be more activated and used because of this close proximity,” said Watermark Chief Investment Officer Bryan Schachter. “We don’t come into projects with prescribed strategies; we try to collaborate with our neighbors, and this cross-ownership partnership creates greater affiliation. We’re excited about the opportunity.”

Watermark is considering more mixed-use and intergenerational projects in urban locales to meet changing consumer preferences with prospective residents, specifically younger baby boomers, Schachter said. In the past, senior living as part of a mixed-use project was an “afterthought” in design, but that mindset is changing as the incoming generation seeks out more active and urban places to live, he added. However, knowing when to execute a mixed-use plan that includes senior living is more of an art than a science.

“You don’t want to be the first mover into the mixed-use space, but you don’t want to be the last because it’s very tough to thread the needle of when is the right time to get involved,” Schachter said.

The recent Bellevue project builds on the intergenerational success seen at The Watermark at Napa, a 173-unit community situated on the grounds of the private Catholic academy, Justin-Siena High School. The community offers opportunities for residents and students to interact throughout the school year.



Some senior living operators have made inroads in intergenerational living concepts through affordable senior housing projects. Carmichael, California-based nonprofit senior living provider Eskaton has a partnership with Mercy Housing to build new units for senior living residents and a component of multifamily units on the property.

CEO Sheri Peifer told SHN the multi-family and affordable senior living community spans 45 one- and two-bedroom apartments, with a second phase of construction to add an additional 45 units. To build connections outside of the residents the organization serves, Peifer said Eskaton has plans in place for a future community garden between the senior living dwellings and multifamily apartments.

“We have to figure out ways in which we can create connected communities,” Peifer told SHN. “That’s why it’s important that we listen to the market and understand where we’re going, to offer choices, and I would love to see us do more with Mercy across California. That’s something I want to think more about: How can Eskaton go further?”

As some senior living providers have ventured into active adult projects, developers have been forced to make tough decisions regarding their community’s makeup, from unit counts to remaining age-restricted in lower acuity settings and build for enhanced care infrastructure in for higher acuity care.

Charleston, South Carolina-based Greystar is currently adding more intergenerational components into its multiple active adult projects, including by building communities in close proximity to other Greystar multifamily properties, according to Senior Managing Director Michael Levine.



But the company is also aware that doing so requires striking a delicate balance between the kinds of amenities and designs that active adult residents want with the wider general public.

In fact, mixing intergenerational, multi-family living, and active adult units can even depreciate the perceived value of age-restricted housing, Levine said.

“When you mix the spaces together, it takes away what we are offering, which is we want someone to have a place of refuge that is a lock-and-leave community,” he added.

To delineate between those spaces, Greystar has taken a similar approach as seen by Watermark by developing standalone communities that are nearby mixed-use multi-family properties “side by side.”

This approach is due to demand from active adult residents seeking additional dining options and popular amenities like a movie theater, a well-appointed fitness center, and outdoor green spaces.

“The domain is so important,” Levine said. “Our residents share those amenity spaces with residents, but when they come home, they want to feel that comfort that we offer in our communities.”

To succeed in marketing active adult communities alongside mixed-use, multi-family counterparts is a constant balance, Levine said.

“You also lose the premium with the active adult because you’re not really providing a unique environment for that,” he added. “It’s not age-restricted living anymore. It’s age-targeted. And so when you start doing age-targeted, you’re dropping the premium. And it becomes a really difficult community to monitor and run.”

## **Creating a ‘catalyst’ for intergenerational living**



Senior living operators can locate their communities next to multifamily, they can build amenities that people of all ages will want – but all is for naught if people choose not to share spaces. That is why some operators are focused on creating not only intergenerational layouts, but also the spark that drives such interactions.

Creating intergenerational concepts in rural markets is tough given there are simply fewer people to interact with. But in some cases, senior living communities themselves can serve as the catalyst for intergenerational interactions, according to Margaret Yu, director of client experience at architecture firm RLPS.

Yu noted a senior living community operated Three Pillars Senior Living community in Dousman, Wisconsin, that is spurring more development in a once-quiet market.

The community is currently engaged with RLPS on a master plan effort that includes a town center with a main street and retail spaces, along with amenity spaces that will be operated by Three Pillars, Yu said. Initial design work is underway, and the project is expected to break ground in 2025.

“[The community] became this catalyst for the new town center,” Yu added.

RLPS designers told SHN there is a “mix of social engineering” that must be done in considering what types of spaces to include, along with a physical layout of communities, when attempting to create intergenerational spaces.

“What I have seen is the evolution away from these add-on concepts to intergenerational aspects really being the driving force behind an entire development,” Yu said, referencing the planning success seen by Three Pillars Senior Living.



But getting stakeholder input, from residents to the general public, is key to the success of any intergenerational-based concept for senior living and mixed-use development, Winters said.

“It’s a really important ingredient that takes a lot of time and money to bring some of that across the finish line,” Winters added.

RLPS designers have participated in shaping multiple intergenerational projects over the years. Recently, the company has been working in partnership with Goucher College and Edenwald Senior Living to jointly develop a university-based retirement community on the campus.

“There’s this balance you strike when you’re designing these types of communities between the wants and needs of older adults and the wants and needs of the surrounding community, and the right level of ‘togetherness’ we’re trying to achieve,” said RLPS Senior Designer Max Winters. “There may be parts of the site where we want to be very much together and open and sharing, and there may be parts of the building where we want to be a little bit more separate and a little bit more private.”

Lasell Village is another operator that uses university campuses as staging grounds for intergenerational interaction.

The community employs a number of students within the school, from dining staff to front office staff that lead to organic intergenerational connections between residents and students.

Central to Lasell Village’s success is creating volunteer opportunities for residents to participate in student research projects as an equal partner in learning, Abid-Wood said. Residents are also required to participate in 450 hours of learning activities, including classes, research projects, volunteerism, fitness participation and cultural activities.



“I think it really is important to offer those choices, opportunities for people to challenge themselves and go outside of their comfort zone, and then opportunities for people to do what they’re interested in,” Abid-Wood told SHN.

Lasell Village residents are also represented within the student government association on campus, allowing for ongoing collaboration and communication between the university and community.

“It’s not just cookies and lemonade for intergenerational events, but about really driving research, driving partnerships, and driving leadership in the [intergenerational] space,” Abid-Wood said.

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**Companies featured in this article:**

[Greystar](#), [Lasell Village](#), [RLPS](#), [Three Pillars Senior Living](#), [Watermark Retirement Communities](#)

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