

NEW HOMES



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The new age of old age

Resort-style residences create 'a sanctuary' for well-off seniors

KIM PEMBERTON
Vancouver Sun

A spacious suite with access to a top chef, swimming pool, theatre room, massage centre, hair salon and library, to name just a few of the amenities just outside your door.

This may sound like a well-appointed stateroom on a cruise ship, but the description refers to the everyday living conditions for some seniors who are opting to retire in style. Their "old-age homes" offer such deluxe living conditions that every day could be lived like a holiday.

Retirees don't have to fear the stereotypical "old-age home" thanks to developers recognizing a relatively new demographic — aging baby boomers with bucks who can afford to rent or own luxury housing.

"A lot of retirement homes can be depressing where seniors are just sitting there, but it doesn't have to be that way," says Karen Holmgren, the executive director of Cedarbrooke Chateau in Mission, B.C.

Cedarbrooke Chateau is a new 138-bed retirement home scheduled to open March 1.

It offers all of the above amenities and then some. When in full swing, the home will have up to 30 staff, including an activity director and top chef.

"We're just trying to give seniors their best life. Our vision is to create a sanctuary for seniors," says Holmgren, who works for Kingsway Arms Management Services, an Ontario-based company that manages Cedarbrooke Chateau and 11 other retirement homes in Ontario.

In White Rock, B.C., the Pacifica, built and operated by Avenir Group, opened its doors Dec. 1 with the stated goal of providing "resort retirement living."

Of the 175 units, 45 will be for sale to owner, while the others will be 15 luxury lease suites, 99 independent living rental units and 16 assisted-living rental units. The beginning rental cost is \$2,000 per month, which includes two meals a day and access to all amenities.

General manager Walter Downey says this type of luxury retirement home represents a new trend for seniors — luxurious, "almost hotel-like" housing close to services.

"If you build it, they will come," he says. Eighty-six-year-old Muriel Clark, a resident at the Pacifica, could be the epitome for resort retirement living.

The mother of five admits it was a "big adjustment" moving into a retirement home after a lifetime of living in traditional housing.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY IAN SMITH, VANCOUVER SUN

Top right: The Pacifica seniors housing complex
Centre: The second-floor morning room, where residents can take breakfast
At left: Muriel Clark, in her apartment with Pacifica general manager Walter Downey, is the epitome of the retirement-residency experience. Moving into Pacifica from her own apartment was a big adjustment, she says, but members of the Pacifica staff helped make the transition bearable.
Above: The entertainment parlour, complete with baby grand piano at the Pacifica seniors housing complex

But she loves her large, sunny, one-bedroom condo, staff and all the amenities and services available.

"Everyone has been so good to me. They think of everything," says Clark. "There's something going on all the time. The other day they were doing free facials. There were all these little grey-haired ladies lined up getting facials and nails done. They were just like kids. They were so thrilled."

Bill Caros, 85, lived in two other retirement homes before coming to the Pacifica and says this one is a "notch above."

"I liked the other places, too, but I give

this one an A. Everything is first-class. You can feel the energy here. It's really been great."

Eating healthy and keeping fit are a priority for Caros and part of his exercise/entertainment lately has come in the form of the Wii game. He's become the go-to guy to explain how to play it to some of the other residents.

Penny Gurstein, the director of the University of British Columbia's planning school, agrees this type of home is a trend that is catering to the wealthy senior.

"Baby boomers have all this equity in their homes and when they retire they

(have) an option to take out their equity and go into these kind of homes," says Gurstein.

"There's going to be a lot more seniors and a lot more wealthy seniors because of the aging of the population. Also, people are living longer and there's a whole change in what the standards are now. People are used to luxury locations and luxury living. These places (luxury retirement homes) are other worldly. They are like cruise ships."

Developer Michael Chaplin, who was the original visionary for Cedarbrooke Chateau, has another luxury retirement home underway — an 84-unit project in

Creston, B.C., called Cherrywood Estates. That project will also feature a lifestyle component that Chaplin calls "havenplex" — a term he has copyrighted.

"They are like landlocked cruise ships in terms of amenities. Seniors are looking for elite amenities and fantastic food," says Chaplin, noting half of the 120,000-square-foot Creston project will be dedicated to amenity space, like fire-side bistro lounges, restaurant-style dining, and state-of-the-art fitness centres.

"This is the wave of the future."

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