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TAKE A LOOK

New active adult rental projects offer upscale units and active lifestyle

Donna and Tim Allman are members of the “fire pit crew.” They came up with the name with a group of friends because of their nightly ritual. The Allmans and their friends sit around a glowing fire at night and share stories about their lives and plans for tomorrow.

The scene is reminiscent of the campfires of youth but in a much more comfortable setting. The Allmans and their friends live at Avenida, a new rental community for active adults in Naperville.

“We want to be with fun people our age who are living through the same challenges that we are,” says Donna.

The fire pit—and its crew—is just one of the enjoyable aspects of life at Avenida. The community offers a lot of amenities, such as a saltwater pool, fitness and yoga studio, bistro, media room and a suite for out-of-town guests. The lobby has the feel of a boutique hotel.

Avenida Naperville has many activities too, all designed for older adults. There are water workouts, card games and a number of clubs for walkers, book lovers and genealogy enthusiasts.

“When was the last time you made a new friend?” asks Donna. “Do you want to be more active? Avenida might be just the place for you.”

In with the new

New active-adult apartment communities are opening across the country. The

communities are age restricted. Avenida has six projects nationwide. Its Naperville project opened in February.

The term “active adult” isn’t new. It is widely associated with the Del Webb brand of communities that offer for-sale homes for younger retirees.

Active-adult apartment buildings are designed for people who want a worry-free lifestyle that comes with a modern apartment and cool places to hang out, like bistros and yoga rooms. Active-adult projects have a hip, urban vibe that appeals to baby boomers.

Residents who travel like the freedom of renting. There’s no maintenance and no worries about property upkeep at active-adult communities.

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The “fire pit crew” spend bonding time at Avenida rental community in Naperville.

The rooftop pergola looks out at the pool at Overture Yorktown in Lombard.



Newly opened in June, Avidor Evanston has a downtown location close to many of the city’s attractions and offers a “lock and leave” lifestyle to renters.

Works of art | Senior wellness with a creative streak



Capturing the faces of residents at Mather Place in Wilmette is an on-going project created by the community’s art therapist Emily MacArthur, inspired by an Andy Warhol exhibit.

Two Illinois senior living communities, Mather Place in Wilmette and Terra Vista in Oakbrook Terrace, have developed robust art therapy programs that not only enrich their residents’ lives but also promote mental wellness, boost self-esteem, increase motor skills and in some cases improve symptoms of dementia.

Art for art’s sake

Residents of Mather Place, an independent living community in Wilmette, Illinois, enjoy access to an art studio that offers painting, fiber art, sculpting and mosaics. The studio competes with a range of other activities available to the community, so program director and art therapist Emily MacArthur is always looking for ways to entice residents to get involved in the studio.

While planning art programming for 2020, MacArthur was inspired by an Andy Warhol exhibit at the Art Institute of Chicago. She learned Warhol used a projector to start his portrait paintings and later filled in the color. MacArthur

decided to employ the same technique for a series of resident portraits titled “Hindsight 2020.”

Each resident is photographed. Then each image is projected onto canvas with an old military projector—it had been sitting in a staff member’s basement. MacArthur then traces the lines of familiar faces to provide the structure of each piece, but the portraits really come alive once she starts adding color.

“Painting, you can really draw out that little sparkle in their eye or the color in the cheeks,” says MacArthur. “In addition to the portraits, each resident is asked to tell a favorite story about their life. MacArthur transcribes and edits the stories, which are displayed alongside the portraits. MacArthur says, “I hope when other people see the portraits, they see the inner strength of the residents. That’s what I see.”

With around 62 portraits complete, COVID-19 put a temporary halt to activities at Mather Place. But as the

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“Pre-COVID, some of these people didn’t want to participate because they didn’t think of themselves as artists or crafters. Now I’m presenting it as a calming, relaxing, meditational experience where they can sit in the sunshine and make something beautiful.”

Emily MacArthur, program director and art therapist at Mather Place

ART
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community adjusted to new health measures, they have been able to cautiously resume by offering outdoor classes with limited attendance.

The art program has always been focused more on personal expression and pleasure than perfecting technique, but residents who had no interest in art or never saw themselves as artists tended to stay away. But with other activities still on hold, residents who previously self-disqualified themselves are discovering the joy of art for art’s sake.

“Pre-COVID, some of these people didn’t want to participate because they didn’t think of themselves as artists or crafters,” says MacArthur, “Now I’m presenting it as a calming, relaxing, meditational experience where they can sit in the sunshine and make something beautiful.”

Since resuming art activities, only two portraits have been completed. MacArthur is even painting some portraits featuring residents in their masks to reflect the experience of 2020. Right now the portraits can only be viewed by residents, but Mather Place is developing a website to exhibit the series online with hopes of having 100 portraits of the 170 residents completed by the end of the year.

Art as a tool

Art therapy has more than one application and has become an accepted method for helping people experiencing dementia to both express and calm themselves. There are several types of dementia, but some common symptoms include memory loss, declining cognitive abilities and difficulties with speech and language. This can be extremely frustrating. The struggle to communicate feelings or recall the name of family members can lead to depression, anxiety and behavioral issues.

Terra Vista is an all-inclusive memory care assisted living community in Oakbrook Terrace. The art therapy program at Terra Vista was designed with dementia and memory care residents in mind. The Masterpiece Program, housed in a dedicated art studio, was part of the plan

even before the community opened its doors in the fall of 2016.

Natalie McFarland, executive director of Terra Vista, sees the program as more than an opportunity to pursue a hobby. The Masterpiece Program offers participants freedom to express themselves, a boost in self-esteem and a way to lessen anxieties. She says some of the residents benefit from the program so much that they are able to reduce or eliminate pharmaceutical therapies for behavioral issues.

“Even residents who are nonverbal are creating beautiful pieces of artwork,” says McFarland.

Resident art decorates the halls of Terra Vista, and some pieces have even been auctioned to raise funds for Alzheimer’s research. McFarland says many residents recognize their own work even though they may have difficulty recognizing their own family members. Inside the studio is a large canvas wall that features a mosaic of resident work. Each quarter, the canvas is changed and a new seasonal theme is chosen.

COVID changes

Before COVID-19, residents were free to come and go as they pleased to work on their contribution to the season’s project. McFarland points out that the art program looks very different now than pre-COVID. The community has been charged with keeping the residents safe while continuing to keep them engaged.

Elizabeth Howard, life-enrichment director at Terra Vista, says, “Life has pretty much remained the same. With dementia patients, you want to avoid any change if possible. But where we may have had 10 people working in a group, we just have three or even two now.”

When residents are working on the seasonal mural, they are brought in one at a time to work on their section, instead of in groups.

The inner artist

Artist MJ Molino leads the Masterpiece Program. McFarland credits much the success of the program to Molino’s approach to



Painted by Terra Vista residents, this Claude Monet-inspired artwork of the British Houses of Parliament is among other pieces featured in the Oakbrook Terrace community.



The art program at Mather Place combines fresh air with creativity to motivate participation.

guiding residents through their artistic journey. While some residents were artists in their life before Terra Vista, others have learned to get in touch with their inner artist with gentle encouragement from Molino.

“He just has that special ability to connect with the residents,” says McFarland. Molino has been able to foster the confidence in residents to complete artworks by having patience and focusing more on the



Reminiscent art in action as a Terra Vista resident paints and shares travel stories.

process of creating than the perfection of the final product.

Art programs at senior living communities like Mather Place and Terra Vista focus on the wellness needs of their

residents, but the underlying approach can apply to anyone. The meditative qualities of creative activities can help people alleviate stress and process emotions no matter their age or skill level.

LOOK
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Several new active adult projects have recently opened in the Chicago area. Along with Avenida Naperville, other local projects include Avidor Glenview, Avidor Evanston, and Overture Yorktown in Lombard.

Active-adult projects are more like high-end apartments or condominiums. “Our construction is condo quality,” says Robert May, founder and managing partner at Avenida Partners, Newport Beach, California. The units have 9-to-10-foot ceilings, in-unit washers and dryers, and full kitchens with quartz countertops and stainless-steel appliances.

Besides its project in Naperville, Avenida Partners has active-adult communities in Palm Desert, California; Memphis; Charlotte; Denver; and Nashville.

Amenity rich

These rental communities have lots of amenities, like the fancy apartment projects meant for younger people. Overture Yorktown in Lombard, for example, features a rooftop pool, parking garage, fitness center, demonstration kitchen, a dog park and spa and a courtyard with raised garden beds, among other amenities.

Rents at active adult communities vary based on location and the size of the unit. Prices range from about \$1,700 to \$4,500 a month. Unlike continuing-care retirement or life-plan communities, there is no entry fee.



This expansive pool area is one of the amenities offered residents at Avenida in Naperville.

Active-adult buildings typically have one- and two-bedroom apartments. They range in size from about 850 to 1,400 square feet.

The communities tend to be in neighborhoods with restaurants and shops within walking distance. For example, Avidor Evanston, which opened in June, is situated in the downtown area close to many attractions.

“We offer a lock-and-leave lifestyle,” says Mary Boehmler, senior associate at Highstreet Residential, the developer of the Avidor projects. Residents are free to travel without homeowner worries.

Highstreet has five active-adult projects in the Midwest.

Right for you

Active adult communities are different from other senior-living

properties. These communities do not provide meals, though they typically offer a continental breakfast. Also, the communities are meant only for independent individuals. There are no assisted living or health care services on site. Services are typically limited to a concierge.

Most residents are downsizing from big homes thanks to the market for existing homes being

active lately. More long-time homeowners are considering a move.

Sheila Ryan didn’t need her big townhouse anymore. She wanted something smaller.

Ryan was driving by the new Avidor project in Glenview and decided to take a tour. “The place knocked my socks off,” says Ryan. She quickly made up her mind to rent an apartment and moved in two months ago.

She has a one-bedroom apartment with a full kitchen that she describes as “absolutely beautiful.” Her unit overlooks the pool.

Ryan enjoys the activities. She recently took a virtual Chicago River tour in the community’s movie theater. “There is so much to do,” she says.

Ryan has already made new friends. “This is such a warm and nurturing place,” she says. “The staff and residents are fantastic.”

Residents of active-adult communities often come from the immediate area. Or they move to be close to their adult children who live nearby.

The Allmans, who live at Avenida Naperville, sold a big house. Donna loved her yard but was tired of maintaining it. She and her husband like to travel but didn’t like leaving the house unattended.

Donna admits that selling a house is stressful, but worth the effort. “We probably should have done this earlier,” she says.